

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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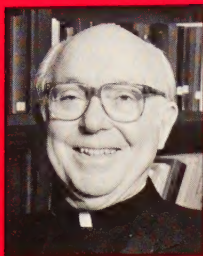
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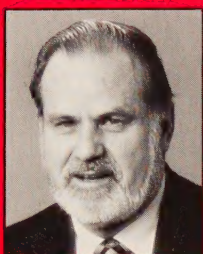




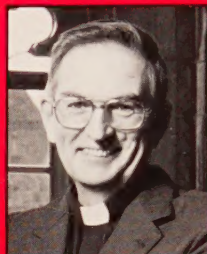
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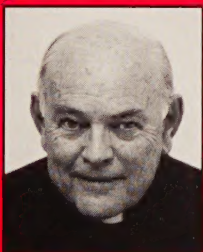
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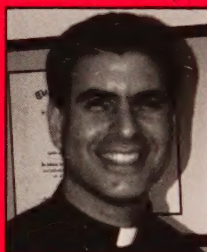
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# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Authors are responsible for the completeness and accuracy of proper names in both text and bibliography. Acknowledgments must be given when substantial material is quoted from other publications. Provide author name(s), title of article, title of journal or book, volume number, page(s), month and year, and publisher's permission to use material.

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Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## A SEASON FOR BUILDING HOPES

**U**ncertainty fills the air as the year 2002 comes to a close. The Christmas decorations and seasonal background music in stores and restaurants do little to conceal the proprietors' worries about the way shopping and entertaining are sagging because of consumers' widespread concern about our nation's economy. The prospect of an international war that will bring unforeseeable consequences is troubling the minds of virtually all Americans. Families are worrying about what will happen to their loved ones who will be called into military service and assigned to stand in harm's way on hostile soil halfway around the globe. Peace on Earth seems remote, no matter how often our ears are blessed these days by the sounds of holiday carols designed to bring hope to our anxious hearts.

But uncertainty and anxiety have always been associated with Christmas. We learn from the gospels that Mary, though pregnant, traveled with Joseph to Bethlehem, where they had no guaranteed reservations to assure them of a place to reside while she gave birth. Soon after celebrating the arrival of the Prince of Peace, his parents heard that King Herod intended to destroy all the male children of Jesus' age. They left by night for Egypt, responding to a message from God, making an unanticipated move that would call for courage in adapting, as migrants, to the unfamiliar persons, places, and circumstances that elicit worries and fears within any exile's mind and heart.

Still, Mary and Joseph were people of faith, and their hopes that all would go well for them and their child were based on the same complete confidence in God's love and protection that had prompted Mary earlier, in Nazareth—though "greatly troubled" at the angel Gabriel's sudden appearance and salutation—to respond, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. May

it be done to me according to your word." She had no idea what crises were ahead for her, yet she had enough trust in God to accept all the uncertainties her still-hidden destiny would involve.

The condition of our world and our lives during the current unstable season and the beginning of an unpredictable new year invites us to summon up all our faith and trust in God's love for us. Our nation's leaders may find that international peace eludes their best efforts, but there is no excuse for fear to prevail in our hearts—not as long as we have inspiring us the priceless example of the trustful Mary and Joseph before and after Bethlehem.

Speaking of uncertainties, those of us who founded the magazine HUMAN DEVELOPMENT a quarter of a century ago have lived all those years with the hope that the publication would eventually find a home on the campus of a Jesuit college or university. We have always believed that such an affiliation would give us access to an experienced faculty, the findings of research scholars, the wisdom accumulated by adults shaping the lives of their students, and many other resources that a thriving educational institution could provide. In welcome response to our long-standing wishes and prayers, President Michael J. Sheeran, S.J., and the board of trustees at Regis University in Denver, Colorado, have invited us to transfer the publishing of our magazine to their flourishing Jesuit institution, beginning with the Spring 2003 issue. We see this change as a providential opportunity to enlarge our staff of writers and educators, broaden our array of topics for articles, and expand our readership. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, we believe, will soon become even more interesting, enjoyable, and useful to our readers than it has been for so many seasons now.

Our year-end change of location is occurring at a time when a chronic and progressive case of cancer that I have lived with during the past decade has finally become seriously advanced enough to warrant my entrusting the editorship of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT



to new hands. An exceptionally well-qualified Jesuit with an outstanding record as an author, speaker, spiritual director, clinical psychologist, and provincial superior—Father William A. Barry, S.J., Ph.D.—will become editor-in-chief, beginning with the Spring 2003 issue. My personal wish is to continue contributing to the magazine as an associate editor for as long as God gives me the ability to do so. Linda Amadeo, who has consistently done so much to further the work of the Jesuit Educational Center for Human Development, will continue to serve as the magazine's executive editor.

We will be saying more about Father Barry, Regis University's mission, and HUMAN DEVELOPMENT's promising future in the Spring 2003 issue. For now,

we want to express our thanks to you, our loyal readers, for what you have done to make our journalistic ministry as productive and valuable to the church as it has constantly been, with God's help, during all the seasons of its exciting lifetime.

We ask God's best blessings during the Christmas season and new year for all our readers, writers, and benefactors. And may the hope-filled spirit of Bethlehem abide permanently in all of our anxiety-prone minds and hearts.

*James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.*

James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

*All the editors, members of the editorial board, and staff of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT, along with the administrators, advisory board, faculty, and staff of the Christian Institute for the Study of Human Sexuality, send our heartfelt Christmas greetings to all our readers, writers, students, and benefactors.*

*We thank every one of you for the excitement, joy, and warmth you contribute to our lives.*

*May God's best blessings enrich your Christmas season, the new year, and every month beyond.*



# The Healing of Violence

*Robert Grant, Ph.D.*

*I am sending you out as sheep amongst wolves. You must be as clever as serpents and as innocent as doves. (Matt. 11:16)*

**M**uch is contained in the above words. They were spoken by a peaceful man who knew firsthand the dangers of the world. Having a price on his head as an infant, being forced from his place of birth, having to evade numerous attempts on his life, and steering clear of the Sanhedrin for much of his professional life taught him a great deal about how to live and work in a world of violence.

He warned his apostles that they would neither survive nor be able to spread the gospel unless they became cognizant of the darker dimensions of human nature (hence the "clever as serpents" reference). Going out amongst wolves is extremely dangerous, especially for those who are as innocent as doves. Serpents can discern deception and recognize who is hiding in the tall grass of privilege. Jesus also cautioned the apostles to balance the serpent's suspicion with the dove's open heart; otherwise, they would fail as both human beings and missionaries. Their challenge, as for all who are confronted with violence, is to hold the tension between the serpent's hermeneutics of suspicion and the dove's capacity to trust and believe in redemption. It is this tension that is addressed in this article.

Good prevails over evil when its purveyors are aware of the risks inherent in dealing with those who have stopped believing in human reciprocity and who use violence to ensure the gratification of their needs. These individuals have drifted away from the human community.

A major challenge confronting the contemporary church is how to respond to violence, both in the outside world and within its own ranks, in ways that embody gospel values (compassion and forgiveness) while simultaneously recognizing the distorted beliefs used by individuals, institutions, and even nations to rationalize the damage they inflict on others.

The Catholic church currently faces this challenge on several fronts. Unless the church learns more about the darker dimensions of both human nature and violence, its best efforts to accompany victims of child abuse, rehabilitate sex offenders, break cycles of generational violence, and end war will be minimally effective.

## UNDERSTANDING IS ESSENTIAL

Justice and peace personnel, missionaries, conflict resolution specialists, and health care professionals regularly confront the effects of human cruelty and oppressive social structures. Racism; the exploitation of women, children, and the poor; and the political corruption and abuse suffered under hierarchical systems (police, military, church and educational)



create many of the victims that church personnel currently accompany. Relief, humanitarian, medical, and missionary personnel live and work in environments of violence and assist numerous trauma victims. Conflict resolution specialists work diligently to end strife in many corners of the world. Finally, church ministers, working with victims of abuse and their offenders, are called to help concerned parties pick up the pieces of their lives.

Violence has many names and comes in many forms. Whether it is through war, child abuse, sexual assault, domestic violence, torture, racism, or terrorism, human beings sustain serious and often life-long damage. In order for the church's commitment to the powerless, broken, and marginalized people of the world to be productive, it must first ground itself in realistic understandings of how offenders justify their behavior, the wide-ranging effects of abuse, the essential dimensions of healing, and the difficult spiritual and emotional questions that trauma raises for victims, their families, the church, and society.

Appropriate understanding of all the above issues not only prevents the depletion of numerous human and financial resources (due to ineffective delivery of care) but also improves the chance that individuals and societies will end long-standing and repetitive patterns of violence.

## **TRAUMATIC REACTIONS**

Traumatic violence, by definition, overwhelms abilities to protect self and others. It renders victims helpless or fearful for their lives. Trauma is most often episodic but can also be atmospheric, as in the case of domestic and community-based violence.

Trauma throws into question or destroys beliefs used, often for generations, to understand self, others, and God. In the short term, victims of violence and trauma experience a variety of intrusive symptoms, such as hypervigilance, increased startle reactions, nightmares, and sleep disturbances. Flashbacks and reliving experiences are also part of the initial intrusive package.

Over time, avoidant behaviors such as compulsive repetitions, self-medication (e.g., with drugs, alcohol, or food), magical thinking, and avoidance of certain topics and situations, along with numerous other activities, are designed to steer clear of trauma-related material that threatens to unravel abilities to cope and stay in touch with reality.

In essence, victims are affected by traumatic material that demands to be acknowledged and integrated into more comprehensive organizations of self, other, God, and reality. If validation is not forthcoming, along with support and guidance, then many shut down and try to avoid anything that is reminiscent of

their trauma or that might retraumatize them. This has tremendous implications for church and humanitarian personnel. If trauma victims are not assessed and treated early, they run the risk of developing a host of physical, emotional, and spiritual problems that often have huge social and global consequences.

Without proper support, victims find it nearly impossible to integrate the significance of their traumatic experiences into wider frames of understanding. Traumatic experiences are then "modified" in order to preserve pretraumatic and collective organizations of reality. In addition, failures on the part of the extended community to be moved by the distress of trauma victims and to sanction offenders harden most in the belief that others cannot understand and do not care. Such conclusions often lead to adversarial and violent stances toward others.

The costs of repression and denial run high. Various psychological and spiritual problems such as addiction, mental illness, autoimmune and stress-related diseases, depression, anxiety, and violent reenactments (both at home and on the streets), along with child abuse, domestic violence, sexual assault, violent crime, and gang violence, can all emerge out of unresolved trauma. Many who have been traumatized, especially on a repeated basis, toughen themselves in an attempt to survive in a world that they perceive as cruel and indifferent. Many conclude that intimacy and reciprocity do not exist and that others cannot be depended upon to recognize their needs. Taking from and exploiting others is considered the way of the world. Worst of all, many internalize the distorted values of their abusers.

This last dynamic is especially important. Criminal or abusive rationales, justifying abusive behavior, typically evolve over time and have deep roots. They are often grounded in unresolved child abuse and typically include having internalized the distorted rationales of their abusers. Failure to address these rationales often leads to repetitive forms of violence against self or others.

## **RELIEF PERSONNEL**

Having basic needs met by Catholic relief agencies and medical personnel after wars, disasters, and experiences of trauma is important but often not enough. The emotional and spiritual needs of trauma victims must also be addressed. Traumatic effects linger long after physical injuries have healed and violent events have come to an end. Unless these needs are properly addressed, many run the risk of becoming bitter and bent on revenge. In some cases, child victims become sexual predators, criminals, gang members, or the next generation of revolutionaries.



The implications of traumatic events are often outside personal and collective frames of reference. Victims desperately need others to provide language and meaning to their painful experience. Holding the stories of victims, without diminishment or attempts to fit them into familiar categories, is essential. Quick fixes, trite responses, or spiritual "pep talks" regarding experiences that often exceed people's capacity to cope are not only of little value but also can create additional damage.

In view of the above, relief agencies need to rethink their agendas. In addition to supplying basic goods, they must also offer culturally appropriate processes that help people reweave the fabric of their personal and collective lives. Otherwise, victims, along with their offspring, remain psychologically and spiritually in tatters and at risk of reenacting violence. Violated people are susceptible not only to future victimization but also to seeking revenge. Addictions, violent crime, gang and family violence, political oppression, and terrorism all follow in the wake of a constellation of wounds and feelings of injustice that revolve around unacknowledged and unresolved violence.

## CONFLICT AND RECONCILIATION

Church agencies working in the areas of conflict resolution and reconciliation must proceed with caution. Scriptural models of forgiveness and reconciliation, as evidenced recently by South Africa's Truth Commission and numerous cases of sexual abuse by church ministers, have had mixed reviews at best. In large part, the shortcomings of these processes result from the fact that their authors understand little about the mentality of victims and offenders.

## SEXUAL ABUSE

Understanding the mentality of offenders explains why an admission of guilt on the part of an abuser is no guarantee of rehabilitation. Numerous cases of sexual abuse from around the world document the fact that those forgiven by their superiors frequently reoffend. Anyone working with offenders knows that they create, over many years, intricate rationales that justify their actions and thus enable them to offend with little remorse. These distorted ways of thinking need to be treated, not just the abusive behavior.

The only way distorted beliefs break down is when offenders are forced to confront the damage they cause and to accept the legal and ethical consequences of their actions. When perpetrators are confronted by victims, leadership, or the law, they are forced to acknowledge the effects of their behavior, not only on their victims but also on their families,

constituents, and extended communities. Only then does reality sink in and change become a possibility. Offenders must provide restitution to victims and others, adhere to sanctions, accept punishment (jail time, probation, restrictions on ministry), utilize counseling, undergo rehabilitation, and, finally, work themselves back into full membership in their community. Unless all of the above are successfully completed, the chances of healing are seriously diminished for both victim and offender.

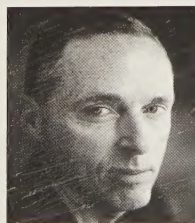
## TRUTH COMMISSIONS

Truth commissions fail for two reasons: (1) Offenders are given amnesty without sanction and, hence, with little effect on their distorted rationales. They are then put back into the general population, where they pose a serious risk. (2) Individuals often hear for the first time, from various tribunals, the gory details of how their loved ones were tortured or killed. In the process, they are retraumatized as their wounds are reopened. Without a public sanctioning of offenders and justice for victims, it is only a matter of time before violence erupts again.

If peace and reconciliation processes are to be effective, conflict resolution specialists must ensure that all parties have first worked through the impact of their traumatic injuries. Failure to do so makes any movement toward peace tentative and therefore dangerous. Unhealed wounds inevitably get retriggered by the insensitive remarks and actions of others.

Key spiritual values such as forgiveness, metanoia, and reconciliation are impossible unless concerned parties are first heard, validated, and required to modify their distorted ways of approaching life. All this involves becoming resensitized to the pain and suffering of both self and others.

Transgressors must be forced to face the consequences of their actions. If such confrontations are done with compassion and an eye for instruction, then individuals, families, and cultures can discover how the dove's compassion, coupled with the serpent's ability to see through deception and hold offenders accountable, creates the tension required to bring emotional healing and spiritual redemption to all concerned.



Robert W. Grant, Ph.D., works internationally as a trainer and consultant to business, religious, medical, mental health, and relief organizations in the areas of trauma, spirituality, and cross-cultural issues. His home is in Oakland, California.



# Jeremiah Speaking Today

*Mary C. Carroll, S.S.S.F.*

**I**n his book *Saying Yes and Saying No: On Rendering to God and Caesar*, Robert McAfee Brown writes that as a child in Poland, Rabbi Abraham Heschel heard a dramatic reading of the patriarch Abraham's lifting of a knife over a helpless and trembling Isaac as he was offered to Yahweh. Listening intently, Heschel suddenly burst into tears but was reassured that an angel would stop the sacrifice. Young Heschel's response was, "What if the angel is a minute late?" Years later, when American soldiers were being sent to Vietnam, Rabbi Heschel recounted the story with the accompanying sense of impending dread. The need of a rescuing angel motivated Heschel to support terminating U.S. involvement, but he feared it might be too late.

Similarly, I have discovered a resonance in the plaintive voice of Jeremiah. Recently, while watching a newscast about "Father Z" facing criminal charges for alleged sexual abuse stemming from an encounter of a dozen years ago, I was stunned. How could this have happened? We were colleagues; he was respected by the high-school faculty and was the "pied piper" to an endless flow of adolescents. I searched for an immediate explanation.

Earlier this year, I experienced sadness when three well-known bishops resigned because of related misconduct. I had witnessed their excellent ministry. Another wave of dismay rolled over me when a former

high-school student was interviewed by the local media because of an incident that occurred when he was an eighth-grader. The tossing of the "barque of Peter," in this turbulent storm of so many sexual abuse cases, forms an enveloping grey cloud of depression, making the words of Jeremiah more poignant: "Incurable sorrow overtakes me, my heart fails me. Hark, from the daughter of my people the cry for help, ringing far and wide throughout the land! (8:18-19).

Heschel himself was attracted to the wisdom of the prophets when philosophical expositions were inadequate for life's tragedies. "Speculative prosperity is no answer to spiritual bankruptcy," he wrote in his book *The Prophets*. Jeremiah asks if Yahweh is still present in Zion; he doesn't explain away the empty feeling but touches the raw pain with a medication that burns and heals. With multiple trips to the Jeremiah text, I am increasingly compelled to more closely examine his identity and role, find possible advice for our current ecclesial purification and cultural malaise, and identify parallels to our own prophetic moment, especially for those seeking a life commitment in the church.

## **JEREMIAH: IDENTITY AND ROLE**

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve minor prophets are referred to as the later prophets in the



Jewish tradition. Jeremiah (7:22; 27:1–2; 32:1) witnessed the fall of Judah in 586 B.C.E. and is identified with the southern rather than the northern kingdom. He supported the reforms of Josiah (e.g., return to the practice of Passover); however, the sporadic efforts did not fully penetrate the unfaithful heart of Judah. Jeremiah warned of the impending doom from the Babylonians; suggested that cooperation (rather than entanglements with foreign alliances) would be the best course of action; viewed potential defeat as coming from the purifying hand of Yahweh; and predicted a postexilic restoration, despite the destruction of Jerusalem. Jeremiah's realism was, indeed, too much to bear, and his choice of compromise with the enemy seemed traitorous.

Viewed as the “weeping” prophet of heartbreaking laments designed to save the people who rejected him, Jeremiah appears the most psychological in his disturbingly emotional dialogues with Yahweh. Without hesitation, Jeremiah takes his vengeful thoughts and disagreements with God to his confessional prayers (11:18–23; 12:1–6; 15:15–21; 17:14–18; 18:18–23). Walter Brueggemann speculates that our own culture, so full of “ill-focused hostility and a deeper hunger for retaliation,” might be healed—like Jeremiah—in the presence of a such a “stunning, approachable” God, who takes us seriously. Jeremiah had to break Judah's addiction to other gods, prepare hearts with searing words, and be an effective mediator.

## CHURCH NEEDS PURIFICATION

Might we be in a similar situation, with questionable values seeping into our consciousness, making personal and ecclesial purification more urgent? I am reminded of a police detective's explanation of Internet crime prevention, in which he described a sting operation designed to target sexual predators. The example was given of a man who electronically transferred pictures of himself, an attractive and muscular male, to a supposedly interested youth. Arrangements were made to meet at a fast-food restaurant; however, the adult male didn't know it was a rendezvous with an officer, nor did the officer realize that he would be arresting a priest. This disturbing occurrence prompted questions: Are there personality profiles that serve as a warning for such exploitative behavior? Is there a discernible profile? Most experts, including Dr. Fred Berlin of Johns Hopkins University, claim there is no unique profile.

Although sexual misconduct and the misuse of authority are multilayered, are there connections to the American attitude that tends to worship at the altar of physical or financial power—and is that attitude also reflected in biblical models of false deities?

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**Our own culture  
might be healed,  
like Jeremiah, in the  
presence of an  
approachable God  
who takes us seriously**

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Although not claiming exact parallels, there are modern influences, akin to mutated replications, that are embedded in the human condition and may tend to idolize certain objects and behavior.

The symbol of Baal was the *massebah*, an upright stone pillar of uncertain character (2 Kings 3:2, 10:26). The connection to the phallic symbol and fertility was fairly common. The temple ritualizing of fertility cults, replacing Yahweh as the primary source of life and vitality, was roundly condemned by the prophets. Baal, also envisioned as the storm god, is symbolized by the bull. His feminine consort had various names but is known (only in Jeremiah) as Queen of Heaven (7:18, 44).

Today's image of power and/or masculinity, from the *Wall Street Journal* to *Sports Illustrated*, is reflected in terms ranging from *bull market* to *bullpen*. The Merrill-Lynch logo of a poised bull cuts a silhouette of reliable strength in a fluctuating stock market, despite the recent \$100 million dollar penalty against Merrill-Lynch for misleading the public. Power, per se, can be positive; however, the transition to idolization or abuse is a short step, as evidenced by corporate mismanagement.

The Canaanite fertility goddesses, combined with the Aphrodite or Venus ideal, also parallel feminine images touted as normative on U.S. magazine covers. Ancient women ate cakes shaped like the goddess (7:18); modern woman might not eat at all in honor of another subtle phantom goddess—that of appearance. Jeremiah writes, “Am I the one they are provoking? declares the Lord. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?” (7:19). The ancient deities, or their facsimiles, may breathe again in our own choices and unfortunate addictions.



Victimization of children through labor exploitation, incest, abortion, or pedophilia has a more remote but applicable parallel in the fiery immolation of offspring to the ancient god Molech. According to the prophets, this practice was considered despicable to Yahweh:

They turned to me their backs, never their faces; and though I taught them so urgently, so untiringly, they would not listen and accept correction. Instead, they set up their Horrors in the Temple that bears my name to defile it, and built the high places of Baal in the Valley of Ben-Hinnon, to burn their sons and daughters alive in honor of Molech: a thing I have never ordered, that had never entered my thoughts—that they would cause Judah to sin by anything so loathsome. (32:33–35)

More recently, the *Boston Globe* and the media in general have implied that children are, in a sense, “sacrificed” to ecclesial pride or clerical protectionism. The *Newsweek* cover (3/4/02) with the word “shame” underneath the face of a prominent prelate, or the question featured on another cover, “Can the church save itself?” (*Time*, 4/01/02), serve to underscore a sense of humiliation and embarrassment for the church. Perhaps Jeremiah’s admonition might seem excessively strident and unfair, but recent U.S. events have heightened its possible significance: “For you have as many gods as you have towns, Judah! You have built as many altars to Shame, as many incense altars to Baal, as Jerusalem has streets!” (11:13).

Archbishop Harry Flynn of Minneapolis–St. Paul, writing in *The Priest* (June 2002), said, “One of the greatest mistakes we made in the beginning was following legal advice to stay away personally from the victims. When the victimizer is a priest, and certainly when the victim is an adolescent or a child, the Church must stand ready to reach out in the most dramatic way.” Some bishops also regret that they followed the advice of psychologists who assured them that treatment was successful and that some sexual offenders could be reassigned. Unwittingly, some legal and medical advice now seems like that of the false prophets that Jeremiah railed against: “Delusive visions, hollow predictions, daydreams of their own, that is what they prophesy to you” (14:14).

Canon lawyer Thomas Doyle, O.P., and others sent earlier warnings to all the bishops, claiming that such a debacle could occur if measures were not taken sooner. The bishops’ sexual misconduct guidelines of the 1990s were not mandatory or universally applied; perhaps, like the Josiah reform measures of ancient Judah, they were not strong enough to avoid catastrophe. Listening to Jeremiah’s relentless warnings, one can understand why offenders would cringe to hear his words regarding the appearance of im-

passability and annihilation. Nevertheless, Judah had to take responsibility for its plight because “Yahweh says, ‘This is because they have forsaken my Law which I gave them and have not listened to my voice or followed it, but have followed their own stubborn hearts, have followed the Baals as their ancestors taught them’” (9:14).

In a positive vein, Jeremiah pointed out, to those who would listen, that Yahweh was willing to purify their intentions and give them the same zeal that they had used for Baal: “But having uprooted them, I shall take pity on them again and bring them back each to its own heritage, each to its own country, and if they carefully learn my people’s ways and swear by my name, ‘As Yahweh lives,’ as they have taught my people to swear by Baal, then they will be reestablished among my people” (12:15–16).

## BIBLICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS

One week after the Bishops’ Conference in Dallas (June 2002) agreed on a sexual abuse policy and made concerted efforts to reestablish credibility, the National Religious Formation Conference met in Illinois with over forty final-vow candidates from across North America. What is on the mind of a religious taking vows or a seminarian seeking ordination at this time? Are they similar to a Jeremiah who, despite bleak predictions regarding the enemies’ power to tear everything down, still buys property in the doomed area? The prophet writes, “Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Israel, says this: Take these deeds, the sealed deed of purchase and its open copy, and put them in an earthenware pot, so that they may be preserved for a long time. For Yahweh Sabaoth, God of Israel, says this: Houses, fields and vineyards will again be bought in this country” (32:13).

To expand our view of the prophetic call, especially for the vowed religious, let us consider parallels between four biblical stages—call, identity, growth, demise/exile—and four similar historical developments in apostolic religious life. The first biblical stage was Abraham’s call and revolutionary awareness of a progressive movement toward the transcendent One. That concept is strikingly differed from the Near Eastern circular and static pattern of life, which offered no notion of progressive change and a minimal sense of personal significance beyond the group. As Thomas Cahill’s *Gifts of the Jews* claims, Abraham went from “the old world of the wheel to the new world of the journey.” He took off his shoes on holy ground, but he also took leave of a restrictive way of perceiving reality.

The second stage was the Mosaic feat of forging a people’s identity in the desert. It was equally revolu-



tionary because an alternative community, in contrast to the common imperial world of oppression, was created. In *The Prophetic Imagination*, Walter Brueggemann aptly notes the novelty of this: “The participants in the Exodus found themselves, undoubtedly surprisingly to them, involved in the intentional formation of a new social community to match the vision of God’s freedom. This new social and spiritual reality lasted beyond two centuries.

The third category includes David’s expansion of borders to the widest national limit and Solomon’s building of the first temple. At this point there is a discernible accommodation to “think like other nations” rather than to take a more countercultural position. Soon foreign deities and ways of perceiving reality were introduced through alliances and marriages. Solomon’s son was defiant in taxing the northern tribes, despite their complaints, so the scene was set for division.

The subsequent separation of Israel and Judah led to the fourth stage of demise and exile. The continued dependence on foreign gods sparked an urgency and a proliferation of the prophetic warnings. The Northern Kingdom of Israel (the lost tribes) was the first to fall, while the Southern Kingdom of Judah assumed a false sense of invulnerability because of possessing Jerusalem. By 586 B.C.E. the south also fell—but there, the waves of exiles from the conquered Judah were able to retain a modicum of identity, unlike those in the north. With the temple destroyed and the priestly class reduced, the lay community in exile created the synagogue and the rabbi class of teachers. The changed political climate allowed the remnant—actually, only a few refugees—to return after a seventy-year interval.

I would suggest that these four biblical stages—call, identity, growth, and demise/exile—find some parallel in Western apostolic congregations founded largely in the post-French Revolution era or nineteenth-century period. There was the Abrahamic initiating call of the founders/foundresses; the Mosaic building of a countercultural identity, usually with a specific social ministry; the Davidic expansion of schools and hospitals, especially in North America; and the time of diminishment, demise, exile, and prophecy in the post-Vatican II world.

Culturally, religious vows appear rather un-American as ideals. In the first two historical stages, call and identity, perhaps poverty was prominent in fledgling congregations. By the third stage of growth, massive ministerial needs may have made obedience more challenging. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, the great exodus of religious since Vatican II, and the more recent widespread media coverage of aberrant sexual behavior, the third vow of celibate

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## Since Vatican II, many attempting to live the consecrated life have crossed three time zones: medieval, modern, and postmodern

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chastity now has center stage. Unfortunately, celibacy is seldom appreciated as a life-giving ecclesial charism; it is more often discussed as a mandatory discipline (particularly for the diocesan priesthood) and frequently dismissed as totally without merit. Who, then, can be a credible, inspiring, and prophetic witness to celibacy in this current climate?

I would suggest that Joseph Cardinal Bernardin appears to be a timely model. His autobiographic *Gift of Peace* is captivating in its simplicity and honesty. Starting with an account of the alleged sexual improprieties with Stephen Cook, Bernardin shares why he chose, against legal advice, to appear before a press conference and not use archdiocesan funds to defend himself. The cardinal stood alone to answer questions and was ultimately believed. His accuser recanted the story, and Bernardin pursued a successful reconciliation. A betrayal of sorts is implied, as a fellow clergyman prompted Cook to come forward with unclear and unsubstantiated memories. Although the late cardinal would not have wanted to “avenge” anyone, the sentiments of Jeremiah might apply: “Yahweh, you know! Remember me, take care of me, and avenge me on my persecutors. However long your anger endure, do not snatch me away. Realize that I suffer insult for your sake. When your words came, I devoured them; your word was my delight and the joy of my heart; for I was called by your Name, Yahweh, God Sabaoth” (15:15–16).

If there are credible parallels between the four biblical stages and the developmental stages of vowed apostolic life, then religious (although certainly not exclusively) may be in a gifted period for the prophetic voice. Only time will prove the efficacy of that assumption. Prophecy is not relegated to only



one stage; however, it tends to become more prominent during instability and confusion, just as stars are more readily seen at night.

Consider that since Vatican II, many attempting to live the consecrated life have crossed three time zones: medieval, modern, and postmodern. Freedom to make choices, dearly valued by religious, was made at the cost of predictable stability. Vatican II's encouragement to embrace the world risked the embracing of "worldliness" as well. In a world of multiple choices, mixed motivations, and unclear boundaries, religious are compelled to be countercultural, visionary, and prophetic, despite the human tendency to be compromised or usurped by social values.

The theme of prophetic witness by the "critiquing of social and ecclesial values and structures . . . and being converted by the marginalized" has been listed as the first of ten transforming elements that the Conference of Major Superiors of Men and the Leadership Conference of Women Religious consider essential to religious life for the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the prophetic stance is not just "over and against" the cultural choices. In *Finding the Treasure: Locating Catholic Religious Life in a New Ecclesial and Cultural Context*, Sandra Schneiders claims that "it is no longer possible to understand Religious Life as purely and simply 'otherworldly' or totally 'anticultural.' Prophetic presence in the world cannot be understood by way of total separation or unqualified condemnation. It must be by way of dialogue with the surrounding culture."

Prophets don't tell the future; they tell the truth, and that becomes the future. They often do it at their own peril. Abraham Heschel claims that the prophet has the sensitivity to hear things an octave higher. In

a cacophonous world, that could be a disturbing gift. The prophets provide images that don't just shine; in Heschel's words, "they must burn."

Having considered Jeremiah's life and passionate words, our own cultural and ecclesial gods, and the urgency of the more prophetic stance, I must include a personal wish—obtainable only through the Spirit—that has grown out of this reflection. At this historically critical juncture, I hope that we can all be more prophetic than comfortable, more empathically involved than distant, more radically honest than fearfully polite, more full of fire for positive purification than full of criticism for its pain, and more given to realistic hope than to the platitudes of lip service. I am confident that there will be other, contemporary Jeremiahs, who can remind us and renew us:

Look, the days are coming, Yahweh declares, when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel (and the House of Judah), but not like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of Egypt, a covenant which they broke, even though I was their Master, Yahweh declares. No, this is the covenant I shall make with the House of Israel when those days have come, Yahweh declares. Within them I shall plant my Law, writing it on their hearts. Then I shall be their God and they will be my people. (31:31–34)



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# Traveling Together to Emmaus

*Brother Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.*

**I**magine the excitement surrounding a promise soon to be fulfilled, the expectation associated with an ancient longing approaching its realization. Then imagine the discouragement and even despair that emerge when that excitement and expectation are shattered in a moment. Finally, imagine the confusion on hearing a story that says all is not lost—a story of enduring hope. This is precisely the situation for the two disciples “traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking to each other about all these things.” This is the very day of the Lord’s resurrection.

This delightful and familiar story, found only in the twenty-fourth chapter of Saint Luke’s gospel, has proved versatile over the centuries. It is a story of the disciples’ faith journey from blindness to sight. It is a story of Jesus’ pastoral teaching and patient approach, leading others to the light of recognizing his presence and activity. It is a story of the continuing mission and mutual support within the faith community.

The road to Emmaus is also a story of spiritual direction. Jesus’ interaction with these two disciples reflects some important qualities that spiritual directors can nurture as part of their own continuing formation. This article explores the Lucan story for those qualities, not as a formal scriptural analysis but as a means of supporting and providing another resource

for those who serve in the important ministry of spiritual direction.

## **“WHILE THEY WERE TALKING”**

Now on that same day two of them were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and began traveling with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. (24:13–16)

Even before Jesus entered this scenario, the journey had begun. The story does not indicate how far these disciples had traveled or how long they had been on the road. Jesus was not present when they set out; he encountered them “while they were talking and discussing” and making their way to Emmaus. Our own experience as spiritual directors is often very similar. Those we serve in ministry are already traveling along the pathways of the spiritual journey when we first encounter them. The quality that initiates and facilitates our “traveling with them” is our respect for the journey that is under way. Such respect is manifested through two auxiliary qualities that must mark our ministry.



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## Presence and listening do not take place in a vacuum; they unfold within and through the dynamics of the spiritual direction relationship

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First, we must be sensitive to what has gone before. The initiation of our ministry should not divert or disrupt the directee's journey. We must acknowledge and affirm that a relationship with the Lord has been established, even though the expression of that relationship may not be clearly articulated or completely understood by the directee or immediately familiar to us. Whatever the experiences or events that led the directee to us, we must recognize them as the Lord's work in the person's life. Respect challenges us to be attentive to the person's journey as it has unfolded thus far, without assuming that it necessarily fits into a definite scheme we may have for the spiritual life.

Second, we must be detached from any generic approach. As spiritual directors, we are invited into the privileged position of accompanying others on their spiritual journey. It is, first of all, the individual's journey, and he or she must be the one to articulate its finer points to us. We cannot presume to know all that is going on within the person's life. Jesus' example provides a model. He simply "came near and began traveling with [the disciples]" before he asked any questions. The story does not indicate how long he walked with them before entering into the conversation. He adopted their pace and matched their step so he would know something of their experience; he did not immediately recommend any alteration in the content of their conversation. In our ministry as directors, we must have this same detachment. Respect challenges us to observe and to learn so we can understand, without formulating an approach before we have sufficient information about the directee's experience.

Each time we meet with a directee, we are invited to come near, to travel with him or her. However

long we may have known a directee, however well we may understand his or her journey, there is an element of newness in each encounter. We cannot know fully the significance that particular twists and turns, expected or not, may have for the directee. Our response must be ever marked by a profound respect for the person. That respect will be sensitive to the nuances of the journey and to the value and meaning that the directee assigns to them. That respect will be detached from assumptions and generalizations, which can be blind to the quiet subtleties of the Lord's work.

Spiritual direction is, above all, the Lord's work. With the directee, we too must be led by the Spirit to discover the Lord's presence and activity in the directee's life and to nurture the continuation of that discovery.

### "WHAT ARE YOU DISCUSSING?"

Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him." (24:17-24)

Jesus approached and traveled with these two disciples. Initially, Jesus was silent because "they were talking and discussing." The story does not indicate whether the disciples had come to a lull in their conversation or had simply stopped long enough to acknowledge the presence of this other traveler and invite him into the conversation. Whatever the incidental specifics, there was a sufficient opening for Jesus to ask them a question. The two questions that Jesus asks are informational; really, they are the same. Since the disciples do not answer directly the first time, he asks again, though in a shorter form. Then they share their view of "the things that have taken place in these days."

Though Jesus' questions are simple, they can be viewed from two perspectives. First, his questions invite the disciples to articulate their immediate



experience. They will have to reiterate what they have been discussing. Second, because his questions are focused on the disciples, Jesus postures himself for listening to them. He is ready and willing to hear their story.

Among the many descriptions that can serve as a profile for the ministry of spiritual direction, presence and listening are primary. However articulate and thorough a directee may be in speaking about his or her experience, the director bears the responsibility of understanding that experience as much as possible. The content of the director's recommendations and suggestions will be shaped by the quality of that understanding. Furthermore, the director's presence and listening are key ingredients in developing such an understanding.

Presence and listening do not take place in a vacuum. They unfold within and through the dynamics of the spiritual direction relationship, without following any preestablished blueprint. It is possible, then, for the direction process to be deflected and to shift its focus from the directee to the director. This deflection can be quite subtle, especially when it reflects a natural flow in the dialogue. Cleopas's response to Jesus in this scene provides one example of this possibility.

The disciples must have been surprised by Jesus' initial question. Given that he had just entered the scene, his question makes perfect sense. Still, the disciples assumed that the events of the past few days were significant enough to be common knowledge among the people in the area and even for visitors to Jerusalem. Cleopas's question highlighted that assumption. His question also created a crossroads in the dialogue. If Jesus had responded directly, then the remainder of the scene would focus on this familiarity with those recent events to which the disciples referred. However, if he had shifted the focus back to them (as he does with his second question), then the disciples could give their perspective on those events. Jesus, then, could be present and listen; he could understand their experience.

Spiritual direction seeks to discover the means and movements of the Lord in the directee's life. As directors, we must assure that the focus of the dialogue enables the directee to pursue that discovery and then to plan a living response to those means and movements.

## INTERPRETING THINGS ABOUT HIMSELF

Then Jesus said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" Then

beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. (24:25–27)

At one or several points during a direction session, the directee may ask for the director's feedback regarding what had been shared thus far. Such a request is appropriate and even to be expected, given the nature and purpose of the direction relationship. In his encounters with the disciples, Jesus responded to all that they communicated about their recent experience. His response provides us with an approach to be used as we comment on what is said by a directee.

Jesus did not dissect and analyze what he heard. Dissection and analysis might constitute one way of addressing a directee's experience. However, there is a twofold risk involved. First, the focus shifts from the directee's experience to the director's explanation of it. The directee's own explanation can be lost in the process. Second, the director's explanation can supplant the significance of the experience itself. The directee may no longer appreciate the value of the experience in the context of his or her continuing spiritual growth and development. Both of these risks move the directee's experience and his or her understanding of that experience into a low-priority position.

Jesus' approach presented to the disciples an alternate perspective from which to interpret what they experienced. Their initial interpretation reflected the general religiopolitical understanding of a powerful and conquering messiah who would "redeem Israel" from the occupying Roman forces. Jesus, however, offered an interpretation from the perspective of faith, and he called them to that faith. He was surprised that they were "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared." Even as the disciples were surprised that this fellow traveler had to be told about the recent happenings, so Jesus was surprised that they had not understood the necessity of those happenings in light of salvation history.

The very heart of the spiritual direction process is to discover in faith how the Lord has worked and is working in the directee's life. Whether that discovery focuses on one event or on a pattern that emerges from a series of events, our role as spiritual directors is to enable the directee to see his or her life experiences in light of faith. We can thus affirm that God is present and active in the directee's life; this is especially important when that presence and activity are imperceptible. If, through our ministry, we can contribute to the strength and depth of a directee's faith conviction about God's constant and loving involvement in his or her life, then we have given a gift that



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## **Directors must be alert to ways in which directees may become overly dependent on their advice or suggestions before making even simple decisions**

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will remain a significant support for that individual's spiritual journey, now and for the future.

There are some assumptions to be noted in all this—assumptions that are challenges for our own spiritual life as directors. Assisting others to develop and sustain a faith perspective assumes that we practice this in our life, that we strive to see the events and experiences that unfold before us as expressions of God's continuing work in our life. It assumes that we are people of faith. Such assistance also assumes that we can stand in awe and reverence at the Lord's word and work in our own life and in the lives of others. It assumes that we are people of humility.

Spiritual direction is built upon faith and works by faith. It is a relationship in faith. It is a dialogue from faith to faith, from heart to heart, from the Lord present and active in one person's life to the Lord at work in another's life. Spiritual direction listens for the Lord in faith, recognizes the Lord by faith, and follows the Lord's leading with faith.

### **"HE VANISHED FROM THEIR SIGHT"**

As they came near the village to which they were going, Jesus walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, "Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within

us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, "The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread. (24:28–35)

This final scene in the story contains several particularly interesting interactions. First, though no precise details are given about the passage of time, the trio of travelers must have been walking for several hours; "they came near the village to which they were going" commenting that "it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over." At this point, given the cultural norms of his time, Jesus could assume that he would be extended the hospitality of his fellow travelers—yet "he walked ahead as if he were going on." Second, just as the disciples recognized Jesus and so could have shared even more of their experiences and concerns, "he vanished from their sight." Third, even though more time had passed, even though it was outside the usual time for traveling safely, and even after all that had transpired, the disciples "got up and returned to Jerusalem," where they could share with others "what had happened on the road."

In our encounters with directees, we bring many skills and gifts. We guide, encourage, and support; we provide an attentive, compassionate, and understanding presence; we explain, question, and challenge. We endeavor to respect and listen to their spiritual journey in faith. These skills and gifts are some means through which we serve others in our ministry as spiritual directors. Yet we do not and cannot live the spiritual life for them. Our ministry must enable them to continue their personal journey with fidelity, integrity, and passion. We must, in a sense, vanish from their sight so they can focus on the Lord.

This is an especially important point for both directors and directees. The Holy Spirit is always the principal director along the pathways of the spiritual journey. Though dependencies can develop from either side in a direction relationship, directors must be especially alert to ways in which directees may become overly dependent on their advice or suggestions before making even simple decisions. It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the ways in which dependencies can develop and find expression within the direction relationship, but a support and safeguard for directors is regular contact with their own spiritual director or supervisor and with their peers in this ministry. Such contact is also an effective means for monitoring our role as directors in the relationship to



assure that we are not living a directee's life for him or her through undue concern about the details of his or her life.

Our sensitivity to potential dependencies should not be equated with any diminishment in the quality of our ministry. Jesus' disappearance from the scene described in Luke did not signal his abandonment of the disciples. His encounter with them provided sufficient information and perspective that they could reflect on the whole experience and then decide what they would do. They recognized how this experience has affected them ("were not our hearts burning"), and they wanted to share all this with others ("they found the eleven and their companions together"). The whole experience urged them to seek the companionship of the faith community. Together with their sisters and brothers in faith, they focused their attention on the Lord.

Spiritual direction always strives to maintain the primacy of the Lord for both directees and directors. The direction relationship guides directees to reflect on their experiences within the journey so they can understand and follow the ways of the Lord in their life; it also encourages them to share that understanding and that following with others in the faith community.

### **"TRAVELING WITH THEM"**

"Traveling with them" is an invitation we receive, a privilege we have, and a responsibility we bear in our relationship with directees. The qualities identified here have been separated only for the purpose of these reflections. Like the spiritual journey itself, they are a fine weaving, linked and working together

within our ministry. There are many other qualities that serve to enhance the effectiveness of our ministry as spiritual directors. These are primary. The story of the disciples' encounter with Jesus on the road to Emmaus reminds us of those basic elements that remain part of our ministry throughout a directee's spiritual growth and development.

"Traveling with them" requires a respect that recognizes the uniqueness of each directee's journey, acknowledges that the journey has already begun, and is unencumbered by our own assumptions regarding the ways in which the Lord must be working in this person's life. Respect, as well as the presence and listening that facilitate understanding, unfold in the context of faith; they are supported by faith; and they work with faith to facilitate the directee's deepening relationship with the Lord. That relationship—that focus on and union with the Lord, above all—are the source, sustenance, and summit of the spiritual journey. They constitute the goal toward which our ministry as spiritual directors must guide directees.

"Traveling with them" in this way will assist directees in recognizing, knowing, and articulating "what had happened on the road, and how [the Lord] had been made known to them."



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# The Ministry of Public Prayer

*William A. Barry, S.J.*

**P**eople who engage in ministry in the church perform a variety of activities: they visit the sick and imprisoned, counsel the confused and lost, give spiritual direction, preside at liturgies, proclaim the word of God in liturgies, lead congregations in singing, provide hospitality in parishes, preach about God's word, explain church teaching, and help people to make informed moral decisions. In most of these activities, if they speak, they speak *about* God; in other words, they use the nominative case. In this article, however, I want to reflect on the use of another case, the vocative, and ask the reader to reflect with me about those times when ministering people address God publicly.

We use the vocative case when we speak directly to another. *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* defines it thus: "designating, or pertaining to, the case denoting that which is addressed." We use this case, in other words, when we communicate with another person. When we use it, we are conscious of the presence of another who will hear and respond to us. For example, "Get away from my car!" expects a response from the other. "I love you," similarly, expects a response. But the response is not within my power. I may want the other to move away from my car, but he or she may just sneer, smash a window, and run away. To my "I love you," the response may be an embarrassed

laugh. The point is that when we use the vocative case, we are consciously addressing another and expecting some reaction. Most of the reactions we wait for are up to the other, not in our control. In other words, when we address another, for the most part, we enter into dialogue with the other, and we can be surprised by the response we receive. In addition, really to address another requires an awareness of the other's presence; in other words, an address to another cannot be made when we are unconscious or so caught up in concerns having nothing to do with the other that we are not aware of the other's presence. To address another is to engage in a relationship, and the more intimate the address, the more intimate the relationship.

With these ideas of the vocative as background, let's reflect on those times when ministering people use the vocative with God. Certainly, the priest who presides at Eucharistic liturgies must use the vocative case. He addresses God directly in the opening and closing prayers, at the prayers of the faithful, and throughout the entire canon of the mass. Those who lead congregations in song often use the vocative case, as many hymns are addressed to God. But just as certainly, those who visit the sick and comfort the afflicted, whether ordained or not, are often asked or expected to address God in the course of their min-



istry. Spiritual directors may begin sessions with a prayer; if this is not their practice, they may be asked to do so by a particular client. For the sake of completeness, I need to mention the prayer many people say publicly before a meal; most often this too is a direct address to God made in the presence of others.

## **PUBLIC PRAYER IS DIFFICULT**

It is not easy to pray publicly. It is easy enough to say the words of a prayer, but to pray means to engage in a personal relationship with God, to address God. If you have not tried to do this publicly, you may not be aware of how difficult it is. But perhaps readers who have not tried it can get some sense of the difficulty by reflecting on their own public recitation of the “Our Father” at mass. In this prayer we address God directly. But if you are like me, you may often say this prayer without adverting much to the fact that you are addressing God. Distractions easily take over. We may notice what others are wearing, how they stand; we may get irritated with those who want or don’t want to hold our hands; we may wonder what dinner will be like today; we may sneak a glance at a watch to see how late the mass is running. As you see, it is not easy to address God when others are around. In fact, it is not easy to address God even when we are alone. All books on prayer address the problem of distractions in prayer, an indication that remaining focused on God in prayer has been found difficult by most people who take prayer seriously.

Now put yourself into the shoes of the principal celebrant and think of all the possible distractions with which he has to contend in addition to these. He is facing the congregation and leading the people in prayer. His attention can be caught by the grim expression of someone in the front row, and he may wonder what’s wrong or, perhaps, whether he’s the cause of the grimace. This might remind him of his homily and his concerns about how people reacted to it. Or he may become aware of how tired his feet are after standing for almost half an hour. In addition, he may wonder about his own countenance and what he looks like to the congregation.

Now, think of a married laywoman whose ministry is to visit the sick of her parish. In the hospital, she finds that the patient whom she came to visit has suddenly died, and the wife and children of the deceased are standing around the bed in deep grief. She is reminded of her own grief when her mother died and begins to weep with the family, putting her arm around the widow. After a few moments, the widow asks her to say a prayer. As she tries to speak to God, she becomes aware of her own anger at her mother’s death and wonders whether these people

are angry with God. She never addressed God directly about her own anger and is at a loss as to how to proceed now. At the same time, she wants her prayer to be consoling for the grieving family. It is difficult for her to concentrate on addressing God.

I mention these cases just to help readers understand some of the difficulties of addressing God directly in public. But my point in this article is not so much to give hints about how ministering people might overcome some of the hurdles. Rather, I mention the difficulties in order to make this point: if those who minister are not at home with prayer as an address to God with the expectation of a response, then the difficulties alluded to will make it all but impossible actually to pray publicly—that is, to address God and to mean it. This means that anyone who is expected to pray publicly needs to be a person of actual prayer, a person who engages God in a dialogical relationship.

It may seem like carrying coals to Newcastle to talk in this way. But it is surprising how many people, even some who have had a good deal of training for ministry, do not look at prayer as a dialogical relationship in which both parties use the vocative case.

## **ANALYZING PRAYER**

Ask yourself these questions: What do I mean when I say, “I say my prayers”? Am I trying to engage God in some kind of conversation? Am I fulfilling an obligation? Am I repeating memorized words without much thought about what I am saying? Then ask yourself another question: Why do I pray?

As you try honestly to answer these questions, you may recognize how difficult it is to do so. Many religious people, including priests and members of religious congregations, will answer the latter question by saying, “Because I’m supposed to.” Many of us never reflect on why we engage in prayer and what we expect from prayer. I would like to suggest that many of us do not reflect on the fact that our prayers are indeed couched in the vocative and seem to indicate that a response is expected.

Let’s take an example: the Lord’s Prayer. According to the gospels, Jesus taught his disciples this prayer in response to their request, “Teach us to pray.” When we pray it, are we conscious of God as our “very dear Father,” one way of translating Jesus’ use of the Aramaic word “Abba”? In other words, are we aware of being in a relationship with someone who is experienced, in some mysterious fashion, as would be a very dear parent? Do we feel like a trusting child before such a parent? When I say, “hallowed be thy name,” do I know what I am saying to God? Do I want God’s kingdom to come? And what do I mean



when I ask God to bring about His kingdom? Do I really expect that God will give me my daily bread? What do I expect by asking God for this? Do I believe that God will hold me to the statement I make to Him when I say, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who have trespassed against us?" Do I try to forgive others as I ask God to forgive me?

We can look at almost any prayer that we regularly say in this way. The Hail Mary, for example. Are we aware that we are engaging in a relationship with Mary and asking her to respond to us when we say this prayer? In this prayer we call on Mary, praise her, and ask for her intercession. We acknowledge to her that we are sinners in need of, and confident of, her intercession. Each time we pray this prayer with awareness, we also remind ourselves that we are mortal and ask Mary's help in the hour of our death.

I suggest that we take some time to reflect on what we are doing when we pray. We will find that our deepest desire is for a relationship with our triune God, with Mary, and with the saints—a relationship of intimacy and mutuality.

God has created us for such intimacy. Indeed, God desires us into existence in order to call us into a relationship of intimacy. That creative desire of God gives us being and makes us desirable to God. Julian of Norwich speaks of God's thirst for us—a thirst that will only finally be slaked when all of us are one with God. That creative desire which gives us being also creates in us a correlative desire; we desire God. "Our hearts are restless until they rest in You," as Augustine has said. This is true of everyone in the world. All of us yearn for God at the deepest level of our beings, because God wants us. We want to be in a relationship of intimacy with God and, in God, with all of creation, especially with all conscious beings. I mention this reality because those of us who pray publicly can count on it. All those for whom and with whom we pray desire intimacy with God. When we pray publicly, therefore, we are praying not just for ourselves but also for all those who are with us at this moment—and indeed, at least at times, for the whole church and world.

## CHANGING PRAYER HABITS

But first we have to get our own house in order. We need to pay attention to our own desire for intimacy with God and to engage God in a meaningful relationship. For some of us, this may mean throwing off some habits that get in the way of praying as a relationship. For instance, many of us have imbibed the notion of prayer as an obligation—something we have to do because, for example, we have been ordained, belong to a religious congregation, or engage

in church ministry. This is not surprising, as many of us from an older generation grew up with this sense of obligation. To miss mass deliberately on Sunday, for example, was a mortal sin. For a priest to fail deliberately to pray the divine office every day was a mortal sin. Admittedly, the modifier "deliberately" took the edge off the commandment, but that did not keep millions of Catholics from regularly confessing missing mass on Sunday, even when they were unavoidably hindered. In other words, many of us grew up with the sense of obligation to pray in our bones. We did not get the notion that prayer was natural or something that we might desire to do. The novelist Jon Hassler may speak for many of us: "As third-graders, we'd been struggling so hard to memorize the catechism, pray five times a day, and refrain from eating or drinking before Communion that we were led to believe that being good was like picking your way through a minefield" (in James Martin, ed., *How Can I Find God?*). When Sister Constance told his class that children served God by playing, it came as an immense relief—so much so that he still remembered the feeling fifty-five years later. Sister Constance's remark gives us a clue as to how we might break the stranglehold of "obligation" on prayer. It invites us to consider that God wants us to enjoy the relationship, not to consider it an onerous obligation.

I do not denigrate "obligation," by the way. Once we have committed ourselves to a friendship, for instance, the commitment is an obligation that can keep us faithful to the friendship when something happens to strain the relationship. But in the matter of prayer, I believe, we start too soon with obligations, before the attraction to God had a chance to burgeon in our hearts.

As a spiritual director, I have had to counsel people burdened with a sense of the obligation to pray to try enjoyment for a while. One tack I take is to ask them what they like doing and suggest that they try doing that as a time of prayer. For instance, one seminarian, years ago, told me that he found prayer dry and boring. When asked to name something he liked to do, he told me that, as an artist, he enjoyed looking at the architecture of the city in which he lived. I suggested that he do this for prayer. His reply: "I would feel guilty doing that as prayer." I told him to do whatever he wanted for prayer, but to tell me what happened when he spent time enjoying the architecture of the city. Gradually, he got the idea that God wanted him to enjoy the relationship. This reminds me of a remark that I discovered years ago, by an English psychiatrist:

*The enjoyment of God should be the supreme end of spiritual technique; and it is in that enjoyment of God*



that we feel not only saved in the Evangelical sense, but safe: we are conscious of belonging to God, and hence are never alone; and, to the degree we have these two, hostile feelings disappear. . . . In that relationship Nature seems friendly and homely; even its vast spaces instead of eliciting a sense of terror speak of the infinite love; and the nearer beauty becomes the garment with which the Almighty clothes Himself. (Cited in Guntrip, H., *Psychotherapy and Religion*, 1957)

One of the lessons ministering people need to learn is to enjoy God themselves and then to learn the spiritual techniques that can be used to help others to experience the same enjoyment.

## HONESTY IN PRAYER

Training in politeness, in being “nice,” can also get in the way of relating honestly and directly to God. Intimate relationships are messy; they go through phases of closeness and distance, of alienation and forgiveness, of trust and mistrust. On God’s side, one can presume constancy, or, as the Bible says, faithful covenantal love. But we are not constant. We do not, for the most part, entrust ourselves to others, even to God, easily. It takes time and honesty. Our most honest prayer often may be that of the father of the possessed boy in Mark 9, who said, “I believe; help my unbelief” and “I want to trust You, but I find it difficult. Help me.” Some people who have been traumatized by life may have to spend some time before they can tell God how angry they are because God did not protect them from their pains. Until this anger is vented in some way, intimacy with God is difficult. How can a person really trust a God who did not, it seems, protect him or her from traumata? Until an abused woman can say to God with some feeling, “Where were you when I was being regularly abused by my father?” she may not be able to be fully open and honest with God.

Once, after a talk on prayer as a personal relationship, a professor spoke up. He wanted an intimate relationship with God, but he knew that if he did get close with God, God would make a particular demand on him that he did not want to agree to. I replied, “Why don’t you tell God you don’t want to do it?”

“I didn’t know I could do that,” he said.

“We’re talking about a relationship, aren’t we?” I replied. “Why can’t you tell God what you actually feel and then see what happens? From our side, at any rate, the relationship with God can be messy and

difficult. Politeness and niceness can get in the way of engaging in the relationship with God.

Those of us who pray publicly need to have some experience of the messiness and honesty of an intimate relationship with God. Honest prayer needs to call a spade a spade. The woman ministering in the hospital mentioned earlier is asked to pray to God in a very difficult human situation, with family members who have just experienced the sudden death of a loved one. This is not the time for bromides. As mentioned, the minister is reminded of her mother’s death, which left her with some unexpressed anger at God. She cannot presume that the bereaved people share her feelings. Perhaps her best approach would be to ask the widow what she would want to pray for and take that as a cue. But she can also pray out of her sympathy for these suffering people and express their grief and loss and ask God to comfort them. One does the best one can and then leaves the rest to God. The point, however, is that real prayer has to take into account the emotions of those who are present and also the emotions of the one who does the public praying.

The main point I want to make is that those of us who are expected to pray publicly, to address God directly, need to have a relatively developed dialogical relationship with God ourselves. Otherwise, we will never be able to overcome the formidable obstacles to praying publicly mentioned in the beginning of this article. Even then, it is difficult because there are so many distractions. But at least we will know what we are expected to be doing—namely, addressing God directly in the name of all those present.

Here is a suggestion that might help to diminish the difficulties. Those of us who are expected regularly to pray publicly might do well to spend time beforehand looking over the prayers we are to pray or reflecting on the situation we will be entering. For example, a priest might periodically take time to read prayerfully the prayers of the mass he regularly celebrates. Those who make pastoral visits where they are expected to pray might reflect beforehand on the situation they anticipate. By preparing in this way, we will have a better chance of being able to overcome at least some of the distractions that are inevitable when anyone prays publicly.

One of the more awesome events in life occurs when, in a group, most if not all of the participants are aware of God’s presence, and the leader articulates that awareness to God. The place indeed becomes holy ground.



# Looking into the Face

*James Torrens, S.J.*

How Jesus looks  
any of these centuries  
after he came forth blinking  
isn't caught in snapshots  
so to us he looks like us.

How Jesus looks!  
He sees us, sees through  
smiles knowingly  
coaxes the latent good  
and restarts our thinking.

I remember, when I was a teenager and young adult, the almost superstitions awe I had of psychologists. I felt they could read me, see right into all the unsettled and uneasy part of me. I was anxious about the gimlet eye, about anyone nailing me. I was in Jesuit formation much of this time, but despite the basic sanity of our teaching and devotions, they did not quite dispel this same uneasiness about God.

Pretty soon, in the turbulent late sixties and seventies, we saw plenty of psychologists who were none too stable and healthy, none too clairvoyant. God was, however, very much still God, still the all-knowing One. And Psalm 139 kept on saying to God, con-

tritely but restively, "Your eyes saw all my actions, / . . . O where can I go from your spirit, / or where can I flee from your face?"

Thank goodness the psalms emphasize that unless the face of God is turned toward us, we expire. In anguish and tribulation, the psalmist often begs God, don't turn away your face. All creatures on the earth depend on being looked at; as Psalm 104 says, "You hide your face, they are dismayed." But I still very much needed to take in—to "appropriate," in the language of Lonergan—the revelation that Jesus is the true face of God. In him we not only look upon God and live; we are attracted by what we see, like Andrew, the future apostle, and his companion in the gospel of John, who wanted to know where Jesus was staying. He responded, "Come and see" (1:39).

Saint Ambrose, in a remarkable homily, elaborates on this theme:

If a person's face is more enlightening than other parts of his body—so that when we look at someone we either see him as a stranger or recognize him as someone we know, whom our glance will not allow to pass unrecognized—how much more does the face of God enlighten those on whom he directs his gaze. (*Explanation of the Psalms*, Psalm 43)

Ambrose has recourse to Saint Paul to deepen the perspective:



In his usual way, Saint Paul has something striking to say on this subject. He employs his gift for making Christ better understood [and] tells us: "God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has caused light to shine in our hearts, so that we may receive the revelation of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6).

Henri Nouwen insisted on the importance of contemplative gazing. He did so at length in his book of meditations on a painting by Rembrandt, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. He did this just as effectively in *Behold the Beauty of the Lord: Praying with Icons*.

Among these icons is "The Savior of Zvenigorod" by Andrew Rublev, from the early fifteenth century. Its severely damaged state (it was found as the reverse side of a step in a barn) merited this description: "A sad but still very beautiful face looks at us through the ruins of our world." Nouwen adds, "The bright azure mantle makes us see more clearly the lovely human face of God." And finally this: "The Christ of Rublev looks directly at us and confronts us with his penetrating eyes. They are large, open eyes accentuated by big brows and deep, round shadows. They are not severe or judgmental but they see all that is."

The final sentence makes us mindful of some words in John's gospel: "Jesus would not trust himself to them because he knew them all, and did not need anyone to testify about human nature" (2:25). Jesus knows, but for this very reason he keeps calling forth the best in us, awakening our potential. He knows the yearning for goodness, and he smiles. Discussing "The Savior of Zvenigorod," Nouwen cites the appraisal of an art historian, N. A. Dyomina: "The gaze is clear and benevolent." He entitles his chapter about this icon "Seeing Christ." Seeing Christ is a desideratum, a task, a cherished opportunity for each of us.

The face of Jesus is prominent in Shusaku Endo's harrowing novel *Silence*, about the persecution of Christians in Japan 400 years ago. In *Silence*, the missionary priest Rodrigues has long enjoyed a singular gift to match his excruciating destiny: a lifelong familiarity with the face of Christ. (This fascination of his, as well as the questions that torment his faith, spring from crosscurrents within the author himself.) "While I was still a student, studying in the seminary," Rodrigues says, "if ever I had a sleepless night, his beautiful face would rise up in my heart." He is about to undergo an almost diabolical pressure toward apostasy—toward the *fumie*, or stepping on the crucifix—but the face stays with him. In prison at night, behind closed eyelids, Rodrigues reviews the life of Christ, concentrating on that face:

Even in its moments of terrible torture this face had never lost its beauty. Those soft, clear eyes which pierced to the very core of a man's being were now fixed upon him. The face that could do no wrong, utter no word of insult. When the vision of this face came before him, fear and trembling seemed to vanish like the tiny ripples that are quietly sucked up by the sand of the sea-shore.

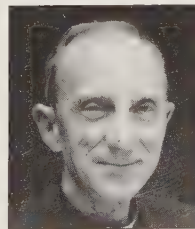
At the height of the priest's ordeal, "that man's face pursued him like a living, vivid image. The suffering Christ! The patient Christ!" The face seemed close beside him, at first silent and then speaking to him: "When you suffer, I suffer with you. To the end I am close to you."

In how many different guises and forms do we all encounter that same face—the Ecce Homo of some Mexican shrine, the Pantocrator in Byzantine mosaics and prayer icons, the risen Lord on the shores of Galilee, the Christ in our parish church, Jesus in some favorite image. "I greet him the days I meet him," said Gerard Manley Hopkins, "and bless when I understand" ("The Wreck of the Deutschland").

The face of Jesus can address us in our prayer. We do not need to have vivid imaginations. We can perhaps concentrate on the smile and the eyes, as the sonneteers used to do in celebrating their beloved. I consider Our Lord gazing at me. An icon, a holy picture (as they called them in grade school) can help me—or just sitting in the Eucharistic presence.

Is there a kind of training and practice for contemplating the Holy Face? Of course there is: the exercise, the activity, the habit of seeing Jesus in others—seeing them as he does, who knows his own, and noticing how they reflect and embody him. This entails an alertness, a sensitivity. Longtime prison ministers have it; they must. Hospital chaplains have it; many nurses and teachers too. How many people in this world reflect to us the Man of Sorrows. Everyone mirrors somehow the glory of Our Lord. May he help us get used to looking.

This daily contemplation, as we believe, prepares us for our real destiny, the everlasting gaze of Jesus. The hymn *Ubi Caritas* expresses this longing: "Along with all the blessed let us see, / glorying, your face, O Christ our God, / a joy that is so rightful and immense."



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# Preserving the Internal Forum

*Matthias Neuman, O.S.B., and Lynn Jarrell, O.S.U.*

**Matthias Neuman:** Formation programs of vowed religious communities have changed considerably in the past thirty-five years. Large numbers of postulants and novices entering yearly, and under one director, have been replaced by one or two incoming candidates who are directed by a formation team. Style has shifted as well, with psychologically weighted evaluations replacing an older regimented group programming. These transitions have not always proceeded smoothly, nor have they always paid sufficient attention to the concerns of incoming candidates.

As a retreat director for communities of religious men and women, I frequently come across situations that involve ticklish issues of personal conscience and freedom imposed by the demands of these newer formation programs. In private conversations, men and women who are postulants, novices, or temporary professed have discussed personal concerns that they find confusing and troubling, especially about what they are asked to reveal as part of their "religious formation." Issues of personal religious freedoms are often at stake—rights that church teaching has clearly laid out and that are protected by the church's *Code of Canon Law*. I do not always find it easy to respond to some of the questions that arise. Seeking guidance for my own queries, I decided to pose a number of questions to a canon lawyer, Sister Lynn Jarrell, O.S.U. We communicated our questions and answers via e-mail, and this article is the com-

posite of those interchanges. It is offered to readers of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT* in hopes of helping other individuals and religious communities who find themselves facing similar situations.

Before beginning my questions, it might be valuable to reflect a bit more on several transitions that have occurred in the formation programs of vowed religious communities in the past several decades. In the pre-Vatican II era, a clear dividing line separated the arena of public conduct from the realm of private conscience throughout the stages of religious formation, from postulancy to final vows. The responsibility of the formation director was to oversee the public incorporation of the candidates into the spirit, work, and common life of the particular institute. Candidates were judged on how they kept the rule of their community, internalized the spirit of the house, and showed a willingness to become contributing members of the order. Internal conscience affairs of candidates were handled through a separate relationship with a spiritual director, who had no connection with the formation personnel. This distinction preserved the privacy of the sacramental bond (which often went along with spiritual direction), as well as the rights of freedom of conscience of the candidate. Formation director and spiritual director never consulted each other about the candidate, other than to assure that direction sessions were taking place. In some communities, the spiritual director



was not even permitted to speak in chapter when the candidate was considered for final acceptance or for a further step of temporary acceptance. This clear division into spheres of internal and external fora was particularly applied in men's religious communities involved in the preparation of priests. The seal of confession was not to be jeopardized, and that caution extended into spiritual direction. The same situation frequently applied to communities of religious women and brothers, owing to the presence of a priest-chaplain and his involvement in both spiritual direction and sacramental confession.

That compartmentalized system has gradually disintegrated in the past several decades because of a variety of influences. Perhaps the greatest single pressure was the influence of the modern psychological sciences on the whole milieu of religious formation. Even before the Second Vatican Council, religious communities were beginning to require psychological evaluations of all candidates prior to entrance. But the scope of psychology's influence began to extend even further. Besides the initial evaluation by a trained psychologist or psychiatrist, communities began to expect that the formation director would provide something like a "semipsychological update" for the community. Formation personnel would often read this responsibility into their own job descriptions. This slowly led formation personnel to make a deliberate effort to get more personal and intimate with (i.e., to obtain conscience information about) their candidates through interviews, formal testing, and other methods in the formation years.

Another factor that especially affected women's religious communities was the desire to provide total formation and spiritual direction by members of the community. This generally removed the priest-chaplain from the formation equation altogether. Over time, even the spiritual directors often became part of a "holistic formation team." Previously clear lines of separation between the internal and external fora, which had protected candidates' freedom of conscience, began to be blurred.

A third influence for breakdown appeared with the increase in older candidates seeking admission to religious communities. These men and women, rather than arriving as late teens through clearly established religious pipelines, brought years of unknown experience and personal baggage with them. After a few bad experiences, formation directors felt the need to probe deeper into every aspect of each candidate's past life, motivations, behaviors, and relationships.

Here we arrive at the crux of this article, where the freedom of conscience of candidates and a community's needed information intermix with the church's *Code of Canon Law*. One canon in particular (#630)

of the 1983 revision of the *Code* deals specifically with the intertwined issues of the personal freedom of members of communities, their right to confession, and the protection of their manifestation of conscience. For reference, here is the actual text of Canon 630:

1. Superiors are to recognize the due freedom of their members concerning the sacrament of penance and the direction of conscience, with due regard however for the discipline of the institute.
2. According to the norm of proper law superiors are to be solicitous that suitable confessors to whom they can confess frequently be available to members.
3. In monasteries of nuns, in houses of formation and in more numerous lay communities there are to be ordinary confessors approved by the local ordinary after consultation with the community; members nevertheless have no obligation to approach them.
4. Superiors are not to hear the confessions of their subjects unless the latter request it of their own initiative.
5. Members are to approach superiors with trust, to whom they can express their minds freely and willingly. However, superiors are forbidden to induce their subjects in any way whatever to make a manifestation of conscience to them.

It is precisely in these issues that members in formation programs can sometimes feel their consciences "intruded upon" by expectations and procedures of formation programs. And here I begin my questions to Sister Lynn.

Canon 630 speaks specifically of the relationship between superiors and members of religious communities. Would its principles apply equally to those individuals who are in formation?

**Lynn Jarrell:** Canon 630 forms part of the norms on Institutes of Consecrated Life, and it addresses how the superior is to treat the entire membership in matters involving the internal forum. The canon emphasizes the individual's freedom of conscience, reflective of Vatican Council II's teaching on religious freedom. While religious freedom is not the same as freedom of conscience, they both focus on the church's role and duty to enable spiritual development among all people. Thus, the fundamental role of the confessor and the spiritual director, if they are separate individuals, is to assist the individual candidate in the crucial work of faith formation.

The canon, in each of its five paragraphs, charges the leadership of an institute to recognize and respect the individual's right to privacy regarding matters involving the conscience. This places a clear and significant limitation on the leadership's authority



and the use of any orders given under the vow of obedience to members of the institute. In addition, the leadership must see to it that confessors appropriate for the membership are available and that the members have necessary means to assess the confessors of their choice. All of this needs also to consider the common good of the institute and the individuals involved. The canon also establishes that those in positions of authority are not to serve as confessors for members unless given individuals, on their own initiative, request this service. Paragraph #3 of Canon 630 directs that houses of formation are to have confessors approved by the local ordinary after consultation with the community. However, the individual in formation has no obligation to approach these assigned confessors, retaining the right to draw on the services of another confessor even outside of the house.

The type of superior-member relationship dealt with in section 5 of Canon 630 is foundational to the common life and the spiritual journey. This relationship should be rooted in mutual trust and respect, and seek God's movement within the individual as well as within the leadership of the institute. Such trust and respect flow out of the basic rights that the church recognizes as belonging to each human individual by birth and as a member of the Christian faithful. There is no way that a group can live an effective life of commitment to each other if there is not an intimate support for each other at the heart of their life in common. This right belongs to all who share in the membership of a community; individuals in formation possess it as much as those who have professed vows. It is a learned and carefully nourished way of being with each other that needs to penetrate every aspect of the members' life together. Individuals desiring to join the group need the lived experience of this trust and respect shared in relationship with each other. Only in this way can they begin to understand what they are choosing when they ask to profess vows in the institute.

In short, clearly the relationship urged by the law is the same for all members, whatever their level of belonging. In reality, the process of formation naturally puts the individual in a somewhat different posture toward superiors who are charged with evaluating the person's readiness for profession of vows. While this responsibility should not preclude trust and openness, it does add another layer of interaction and accountability that the rest of the membership does not have. It is essential that superiors remain conscious of these diverse layers of relating and keep modeling as well as inviting the individual in formation to a relationship built on trust and respect of one's person.

**Matthias Neuman:** Paragraph 5 of Canon 630 refers to a "manifestation of conscience." Commentaries on this canon sometimes refer to the traditional division between the "internal" and "external" fora. When dealing with candidates in private discussion, it is frequently the case that these are terms they have never heard before. What would be good, concise descriptions of "internal forum" and "manifestation of conscience"?

**Lynn Jarrell:** An understanding of the internal forum and of the expression "manifestation of conscience" follows from the basic rights of every individual to privacy, a good reputation, and freedom from being coerced into a particular faith commitment. Although an individual may choose to become a member of the institute with all that this commitment entails, that same person never gives up or loses any of those basic human rights. Without appropriate recognition of those rights for each and every member of a religious institute, the desired relationship of trust and respect between superior and members will not flourish.

Paragraph 5 of Canon 630 states that members may choose to manifest matters of conscience to the leadership. In order for such conversations to happen, both members and leaders are urged to create an atmosphere of trust of each other. It is hoped that this atmosphere of trust will lead members to an honest sharing of the movement of God within their lives. However, as a clear precaution, this same paragraph of Canon 630 goes on to state the obligation of those in positions of authority never to induce or coerce members into revealing their conscience to them. This directive reflects the dual obligation of a superior to be truly pastoral, encouraging members to speak freely while always protecting them from feeling forced to share more with them than they wish to.

Church law thus states clearly that the individual has no obligation to see a superior as the spiritual father or mother of the community, as was often done in some earlier traditions of consecrated life. The law affirms that sharing matters of the internal forum must be the absolute free choice of the individual.

Other canons throw additional light on this topic. Canon 618 describes how the leadership should "promote the voluntary obedience" of the individual "with reverence for the human person" involved. This posture of authority figures demands a wisdom about God's ways as well as a willingness to listen respectfully in a spirit of service. Canon 628.3 reminds members to act in trust at the time of a visitation from leadership or their delegates. This means that the individual needs to respond in truth and in a charitable manner if the inquiries are legit-



imate. Here again, there is a limit here on what the individual is required to reveal. In Canon 748.2, in Book III on "The Teaching Function of the Church," coercion by anyone for the purpose of getting an individual to embrace the faith is forbidden. Similarly, a directive from a superior to an individual to speak about a conscience matter moves into this area of coercion. The law has a sacred regard for the conscience, which is never to be replaced by authority figures or bound by the impossible. Canon 220, in the opening part of Book II on "The People of God," lays out the basis for prohibiting any coerced manifestation of conscience. Revealing one's conscience under any type of external pressure violates the individual's right to a good reputation as well as protection of privacy. These are two basic human rights fully acknowledged by the church in Canon 220. An individual does not lose or give up these rights by entering a religious institute or a seminary.

The internal forum deals with matters of conscience. Manifestation of conscience, a part of the internal forum, is rightly reserved to spiritual direction or the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It is the right of the individual to keep matters of conscience private and part of the internal forum. The church is strong in guarding the individual's right to retain things in the internal forum. In addition, civil society in the United States and other countries recognizes the obligation not to violate the seal of confession or matters of conscience.

The superiors of formation programs need to be careful not to induce any invasion of the internal forum, either directly or indirectly. At the same time, the individual needs to know that once he or she chooses to move a matter from the internal forum into the external forum, it no longer enjoys the same protection of the law. A conversation with a superior outside the Sacrament of Reconciliation or formal spiritual direction does just this, taking a matter from the realm of the internal forum with all its protection for the individual. While most canonists would agree that a superior is bound to some degree to get the permission of the individual to further share information learned in the external forum, the extent of this obligation remains open to discussion.

In closing, the individual member in formation needs to be discrete about what is shared outside the setting of the confessional or spiritual direction. These are the only two settings that are considered part of the internal forum. Both practices should be fully available to all members, including individuals in formation. The choice to manifest one's conscience is voluntary and fully within the discretion of the individual to decide.

**Matthias Neuman:** In some religious communities today, the formation director insists on being the spiritual director of his or her postulants and novices. This appears to be a violation of section 1 of Canon 630, which provides for freedom in regard to the candidate's manifestation of conscience. What measures might formation programs take to preserve the Code's concern for protecting the internal forum or individuals?

**Lynn Jarrell:** Before suggesting measures needed in formation programs, consider the underlying issue in this matter. The Code has clearly affirmed the longstanding moral principle of the sacredness of the internal forum. No individual is to be coerced into manifesting matters of conscience. This principle is to imbue all structures in the church, including how formation programs are conducted.

The role of a formation director is a position that exercises authority in the external forum. On occasion, this role may well involve processes, such as discernment, that invite the individuals in the program to disclose what is unfolding for them. The challenge remains to avoid any expectation or pressure that might force the individual to reveal information under the pretense of spiritual direction. Any such pressuring or mixing of distinct roles strikes at the integrity of the internal and external fora. Emotional confusion frequently results for those caught in this dilemma.

Historically, some ambiguity has emerged around the term "spiritual director." This role has had a dual understanding in formation programs for clerics. The first meaning describes an official in a religious institution or seminary who coordinates a spiritual formation program for the students. The person holding this role is understood clearly to be part of the administration of a formation program. This is distinct from the second meaning of the term, in which an individual (e.g., someone in formation) engages with a person of his or her choosing for consultation on personal and spiritual matters. Confidentiality is required in this second understanding, since it is part of the internal forum.

With this background, there are some measures that could assist a formation program in being appropriately respectful to individual consciences. The first measure is the articulation of a clear, well-communicated policy that separates the position of formation director or any other authority role from that of personal spiritual director. This will entail a description of the various positions. Such a policy needs to affirm the student's inherent freedom to choose one's spiritual director and to be assured of confidentiality around what is discussed in a spiritual direction relationship.



Once the policy is written, a second measure would be a thorough education for all who are part of the formation program. In particular, this education needs to emphasize the difference between the external and internal fora, as well as between the voluntary and involuntary manifestation of one's conscience. Clarity on this point is essential to avoid the possibility of conscience manifestation being mandated under the guise of obedience. Any exercise of authority is an act of the external forum and is never to replace the individual's conscience or the internal forum.

Finally, a measure or procedure needs to be put into place to ensure that each individual has an opportunity to choose, without any coercion or undue persuasion, a personal spiritual director. It is within the rights of an institute to offer a designated slate of directors. This opportunity of choice will not inhibit the formation director or any other authority figures from exercising the full scope of their positions if properly understood.

Such measures should preserve clarity, integrity, and freedom of conscience in a formation program. It is important, if those in the program are to grow in trust, that they experience their rights as members of the Christian faithful as described in the opening canons of Book II of the Code. Entering into formation does not mean that they in any way are to lose their human dignity, as described in Canon 220. One of the principles underpinning the writing of the current Code calls for harmony between the external and internal fora in all practices within the church. A formation program is no exception to this principle if it is to be within the spirit of the universal church.

**Matthias Neuman:** Situations that cross the lines between the internal and external fora can create unfair internal stresses on religious candidates, who find themselves between a rock and a hard place, with all the attendant mental and emotional confusion the situation carries. For example, a 35-year-old postulant is asked by her director to write a detailed history of the "significant relationships" in her life and to describe the influence of each upon her. She had an affair with a married man twelve years previously. Only she and the man know about this. Is she obligated to reveal this in her account to the formation director? She worries about the problem from several points of view, the most troubling being her own sense that she might be getting off to a dishonest

start in her religious life if she fails to disclose this to her director. Yet for her, the affair is over and done, confessed and forgiven, and she really doesn't want to bring it to light or talk about it as a part of her religious formation. Another case: A man of 40 is asked directly by his novice director if he was ever involved in any crimes, whether these were known publicly or not. He worries about a serious theft he committed as a teenager. He realized his mistake and tried to make restitution privately. He does not want to bring this issue up any more in his life, but he feels torn and wonders why this needs to be part of his formation in the religious community. Both of these individuals have the right to their own internal conscience and its protection by the church's law.

With all the changes in formation programs in recent decades, the fundamental religious rights of incoming candidates still need to be respected. Today's candidates frequently have little awareness of the religious rights they do possess. In their position of obvious submission, invasions of their inner life cause great confusion. Religious communities want to make sure that they are accepting good candidates as members of their order, but care should be taken that the rights of the internal forum are preserved.

There is much wisdom here. Respect for the individual, plus an emphasis on introducing him or her into the spirit, work, and common life of the community, will produce stronger contributing community members than those who feel they have been invaded and manipulated during their years of formation.



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# Human Development Revisited

*Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.*

**T**o the casual observer at the ordination of the diocesan seminary class of 1972, it appeared that three of its members had very much in common. Not only were the three friends and the same age; they also shared similar interests and goals. No one would have predicted that some thirty years after ordination, their lives would have taken such different paths.

Today, Father Andy Sharff is on leave from his work as a pastoral minister at the diocesan high school for the past eighteen years. Before that he had been a teacher there for eight years. He had previously served as a pastoral associate at a large suburban parish. It shocked the community when he was recently charged with sexual impropriety involving three male adolescents.

Father John Stevin has served at the marriage tribunal in his diocese for the past twenty-six years. He had worked as a pastoral associate for only one year before he was sent to pursue training in canon law.

Father Jim Gilliam, on the other hand, is a pastor of one of the largest parishes in the diocese—a post he has held for some twelve years. By all accounts he is quite effective and content in active parish ministry. Because of the enthusiasm and obvious talent that he demonstrated during his initial assignment as an associate pastor, he was assigned to a pastorate at a medium-size urban parish and then later moved to

other large parishes in the suburbs. A psychiatric evaluation today would reveal that of these therapists, only Father Gilliam had achieved a relatively high level of psychosexual development.

Psychosexual development is a term that is in the news a lot today. It is an often-used but elusive term; there is little consensus as to its meaning, its method of assessment, or its clinical utility. Traditionally, psychosexual development was associated with the stage model proposed by Freud nearly a hundred years ago. Interestingly, while sexual researchers and clinicians increasingly insist that the traditional concept is imprecise and reductionistic, has limited clinical value, and should be replaced by more narrowly focused concepts such as sexual development or gender-identity development, others in religious circles and the mass media routinely use the term “psychosexual development.” This widening rift, which is more than a matter of semantics, could be narrowed with a more precise, focused, and clinically useful model of psychosexual development. This article presents one such model of psychosexual development. It begins by briefly describing the traditional and reductionist Freudian model, then presents a holistic and integrative model, and finally suggests the clinical applicability of the latter by analyzing the three opening case histories.



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## **PSYCHOSEXUAL DEVELOPMENT YESTERDAY**

Generally speaking, psychosexual development refers to the evolving process of achieving an integrative sense of sexuality and sexual health. Prior to Freud, it was believed that the capacity for sexual responsiveness was first present at the onset of adolescence. With his concept of libido (psychosexual energy) as the fundamental element of human experience, Freud contended that sexuality and the need for erotic gratification are present from the time of birth. He insisted that sexual development involves a continuous tension between biological drives and social constraints. His psychosexual model describes a stage-by-stage process of the growth of human sexuality as it affects personality development. This process of psychosexual or libidinal development was understood to proceed through five stages, each associated with a specific libidinal or erogenous zone where libido would be focused: oral (ages 0–1), anal (ages 1–3), phallic (ages 3–6), latent (ages 6–13), and genital (ages 12 on). This process could unfold in a normal or uneventful fashion in some individuals; in others, it could be stunted or “fixated.” For Freud, “normal” psychosexual development meant internalizing cultural norms, identifying with the same-sex parent, and achieving

sexual gratification with members of the opposite sex. When development was arrested or “fixated,” an adult would continue to seek gratification in ways that were appropriate only to children or adolescents.

Not surprisingly, this perspective has been widely criticized as being reductionistic—that is, focusing primarily on the biological-psychological aspect of libido. This model is also criticized for being androcentric (i.e., male-centered or -dominated) and homophobic (i.e., characterized by an irrational fear of or ideological bias against homosexuals or homosexuality). Some question Freud’s basic assumption that sexual capacity is a primordial biological drive, libido, that is directly expressed in psychosocial and social behaviors and is unmediated by cognitions or sociocultural influences. Instead, they contend, sexuality is primarily a learned social behavior that is constructed or scripted differently across cultures. Furthermore, neither research nor the experience of countless generations of celibates supports the contention that sexuality is an intense, high-pressure drive that impels an individual to seek physical sexual gratification directly or indirectly. Rather, there are several situations in which reduced sexual activity or the vow of celibacy is undertaken with little evidence that libido has shifted to compensate in some other sphere of life.

## **AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL**

Unlike the psychoanalytic model, which is based on a single development line, a more integrative model would encompass four lines of human development that normally evolve over the course of a lifetime. This integrative model spans five age-related stages, from birth through middle adulthood, reflecting the process of achieving an integrative sense of self and sexuality. At present there is an insufficient research basis for more than speculation on later adulthood; thus, that stage is not included. Underlying this model are a number of basic premises, articulated in the next section. Seven such factors or development markers are noted. This is followed by a discussion of fourteen additional factors or development markers associated with the five stages.

## **SOME BASIC PREMISES**

**Sexuality is more than sex.** The term *sex* has two common designations: the biological status based on the appearance of genitals (male or female) and its genital expression or behavior (as in “We had sex”). The term *sexuality* encompasses both sex (i.e., who we are and what we think, feel, and do sexually) and



the meanings given to sex. According to Evelyn and James Whitehead, authors of *A Sense of Sexuality: Christian Love and Intimacy*, “What our body means to us, how we understand ourself as a woman or as a man, the way we feel comfortable in expressing affection—these are part of our sexuality. . . . In this broadest sense, sexuality is how we make sex significant.” Sexuality often involves physical indications of caring and concern, such as touching with or without genital expression or related sexual activities or practices.

**Asexuality is a sexual orientation.** Traditionally, three sexual orientations have been described: heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual. Unfortunately, a sizeable number of ministry personnel are not well represented by these categories. That is probably because the traditional model of orientation is premised on the nature of the sexual attraction experienced. While useful, this model does not account for asexual individuals, who deny or are uncertain of such attraction. An alternate model of sexual orientation has been described by Michael Storms in a 1981 *Psychological Review* article. In this model, sexual orientation is based on the type, extent, and frequency of sexual fantasies and arousal. Four types of arousal are noted, which translate into four orientations. Accordingly, the heterosexual orientation refers to arousal involving persons of the opposite sex, the homosexual orientation involves arousal by the same sex, and bisexual involves arousal by either sex. The fourth orientation is designated as asexual, in which there is no arousal by either sex.

**Psychosexual development is a key facet of human development.** In recent years it has become more clear that sexual development is not a form of development separate from or independent of other forms of development. Rather, sexual development occurs within the context of human development processes, and it includes biological, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions or lines of development. Here, we will follow the common convention of combining the social and cultural dimensions and referring to them simply as the social line of development.

**The trajectory of psychosexual development is influenced by several predisposing factors.** Research and clinical observation reveal that in addition to experiences and developmental challenges encountered from early childhood through adulthood, a number of environmental, pregnancy-related, and perinatal (i.e., around the time of birth) influences appear to have a significant impact on sexual development.

These include testosterone levels, birth complications, and family attitudes about sexuality. Thus, an adequate understanding of psychosexual development should include such predisposing factors, which are distinguishable from developmental factors (i.e., factors associated with childhood, adolescence, and adulthood).

**Because of the complexity of the process of human development, an integrative model of development is essential.** No biological, psychological (e.g., Freud’s theory of psychosexual development), spiritual, or social model can provide an adequate understanding and explanation of sexual development or the even more complex process of human development. Not even composite models such as Erikson’s stages theory, which combines both psychological and social dimensions, are sufficient. However, an integrative, nonreductionistic model, dubbed the biopsychosociospiritual model, appears to offer a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the development process.

**The developmental endpoint of psychosexual development—indeed, of all human development—is union.** In *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, Donald Cozzens describes intimacy and transcendence as the dual innate longings or desires that inevitably and ultimately lead an individual to union with God. He defines intimacy as the experience of union with another, and transcendence as union with creation, with the combination of intimacy and transcendence leading ultimately to God.

In psychology, two core concepts of human development are autonomy and relationship. Life reflects an ongoing tension between these polar dimensions. Mature intimacy and transcendence reflect an energizing balance between autonomy and relationship, which allows individuals to transcend their own self-interest to experience union with creation and God. It is proposed, then, that the expected endpoint of all the lines of human development is a mature and integrated sense of union or intimacy, reflected in wholeness and holiness. In addition, it is presupposed that there is an increasing convergence of each of the four principal lines of development—biological, psychological, social, and spiritual—as the process of human development evolves. Accordingly, we can describe the ultimate endpoint of the biological line as union with another individual and integrated sexual functioning, or sexual health, as it is more commonly known. Possibly, sexual exploration, which characterizes at least the first three stages of development, is best understood as a means of seeking union. The ultimate endpoint of the psychological



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## Achieving a mature measure of interdependence in close relationships is the result of balancing the competing needs for autonomy and intimacy

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line of development would be union with self (i.e., a cohesive, integrated sense of self, including a healthy sexual identity). Likewise, the ultimate endpoint of the social line of development would be union with other persons (i.e., mature relational functioning, which presupposes a high degree of integration in the biological and psychological development lines). Finally, the ultimate endpoint of the spiritual line of development would be union with God, the ultimate experience of intimacy and transcendence.

**The relationship between autonomy and intimacy is the basic dynamic in psychosexual development.** Autonomy (and such related concepts as separation-individuation and independence) is the polar opposite of intimacy (and such related concepts as union, dependence, belongingness, attachment, and relationship). The process of healthy development involves progressively increasing both autonomy and intimacy (i.e., achieving interdependence) while also maintaining a healthy tension and balance between the two. Separation-individuation is an ongoing process that begins as the infant gradually differentiates self from mother in order to achieve some degree of autonomy as a toddler, and continues in subsequent developmental stages until the self becomes fully differentiated. Only when the self is sufficiently cohesive and whole can the next stage of development—full self-surrender and thus full union with others, nature, and God—occur. Accordingly, achieving a mature measure of interdependence in close

relationships is the result of balancing the competing needs for autonomy and intimacy at the same time. Delayed or stunted development reflects a lack of balance and overemphasis on one or the other (i.e., overly dependent or overly independent).

### PREDISPOSING FACTORS AND MARKERS

Predisposing factors refer to those orienting influences that can significantly influence the trajectory of one or more developmental lines. These orienting factors may precede pregnancy and birth or influence an infant's experience of self, the world, and others from the early days of life. These factors may positively or negatively affect the process of development, and the expression of this impact may be immediate or delayed. Typically, these orienting factors influence and confound the various tasks and challenges associated with subsequent developmental stages. Seven orienting factors can be described, along with some probable or actual dysfunctional influences.

**Pregnancy and Birth Experience.** Parental attitudes toward pregnancy can subsequently influence a child's overall self-confidence. To the extent to which individuals sense and internalize that they were unwanted or that their parents were ambivalent about their birth, these individuals may be less certain of themselves or may believe that they must prove their worth or otherwise act out in response. Prenatal problems or toxic influences (e.g., maternal use of drugs or serious illness) can impair normal development, as can problems associated with the birth process itself (e.g., prematurity, cesarean delivery, postpartum depression). While such prenatal and birth experience do not inevitably derail the normal process of development, they can and often do affect attitudes and behaviors, as well as the health status of adults.

**Temperament and Personality.** Temperament refers to the inborn tendencies of an individual to respond and behave in characteristic ways and patterns that are evident from birth. For example, whereas some infants are quite sensitive to light and loud sounds, others are not; while some are calm and placid, others can be very active or fussy. Three main temperament patterns or styles have been observed in infants: easy (usually predictable and in a good mood), slow to warm (more likely to be resistant to attention and moody), and difficult (typically unpredictable, with irritable moods). A child's temperament is reflected in his or her personality style as an adult. That is to say that adult patterns such as optimism and consistency of effort are more common in indi-

viduals with easy temperaments; negativity and suspiciousness are associated with the difficult temperament; passivity and overdependency are linked with the slow-to-warm temperament.

**Hormonal Makeup.** Hormones can greatly influence the rate and extent of biological processes, as well as the extent and intensity of psychological processes. Levels of the hormone testosterone are associated with both sexual desire and sexual response. Individuals with high levels of testosterone can have spontaneous sex thoughts and fantasies, are easily aroused, and desire sex often. On the other hand, those with low levels have little or no sexual fantasy, desire, or arousal. These hormonal levels appear to be constant from the time of birth, suggesting that sexual desire and arousal are relatively constant throughout life unless modified by medication or medical condition. Similarly, the hormone oxytocin has been shown to influence attachment behaviors in both infants and adults. Thus, higher levels are related to greater degrees of attachment, whereas lower levels are associated with lesser degrees of attachment.

**Attachment Style.** Attachment refers to the emotional bond that develops between child and parent or caregiver and subsequently influences the child's capacity to form mature, intimate relationships in adulthood. When the style of attachment is characterized by emotional interdependence, trust, and mutual feelings, it is called a secure style. On the other hand, when the style is characterized by inconsistency or emotional unavailability, it is referred to as an insecure style. Two insecure styles will be described briefly here.

The avoidant style of attachment is characterized by a fear of closeness, intimacy, and commitment. Adults with this style prefer to maintain interpersonal distance. Their parents were likely to have been cold, distant, and rejecting. Interestingly, individuals with an avoidant attachment style appear to have low sexual desire, which likely reflects their early relational experiences (i.e., with their parents). In addition, such individuals tend to deny their own feelings as well as their personal needs. Unfortunately, when these individuals were screened for the priesthood in the past, they were considered ideal candidates for ordination because neither celibacy nor chastity seemed to be problems or concerns for them. This attachment style can be noted in some ministers whose behavior suggests hyposexuality (i.e., the sexual orientation called asexuality).

Adult relationships with the anxious/ambivalent style, sometimes called the preoccupied style, are characterized by intensity and chaos. Individuals

with this style tend to be highly emotionally involved with others, particularly significant others, sometimes to the point of obsession. Sometimes others are viewed as unresponsive, unreliable, or unavailable, which can trigger anger and anxiety in those with this style. As children, these individuals had inconsistent parenting. This attachment style can be observed in some ministers whose behavior suggests hypersexuality (i.e., sexual preoccupation and/or compulsivity, or sexual acting-out behavior).

**Level of Family Competence and Style.** Family competence is the technical designation for the level of functioning of a given family. Highly competent, healthy, and mature families show warmth, respect, intimacy, and humor, along with the capacity to negotiate difficulties and to establish and maintain clear and appropriate boundaries. Families with low competence—less healthy and mature—have problematic boundaries, confused communication, and either overcontrol family members or provide no structure or consistency. Family style refers to the manner in which family members relate to one another. For example, in the enmeshed or overly engaged style, families emphasize extreme dependency and closeness, as well as sameness in how family members think, feel, and act. On the other hand, disengaged-style families emphasize extreme independence, reflected in relatively little cohesion and consistency in how family members relate to each other. Healthier families tend to have a high level of competence and a style that is interdependent (i.e., blends both the engaged and disengaged styles). Needless to say, sexually problematic ministers often come from problematic families.

#### **Family Attitudes Toward Intimacy and Sexuality.**

Parental attitudes toward intimacy and sexuality tend to be adopted by children. Thus, children whose parents hold reasonably healthy attitudes are less likely to have negative or ambivalent attitudes toward marriage and intimacy. Consequently, they are also less likely to experience unhealthy shame and guilt about sex and sexuality.

**History of Early Abuse or Neglect.** A history of verbal, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse in childhood or adolescence can significantly impact the individual's overall biopsychosocial and spiritual development. Research increasingly demonstrates that early abuse negatively impacts normal brain development. It also suggests that adults who were emotionally and sexually abused as minors have a higher probability of sexually abusing minors than do adults without such experience of early abuse.



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## As the process of separation-individuation begins, it appears that children form a God-image that reflects their attachment with their parents

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Having three or more potential or actual indicators of dysfunction on these orienting factors does not necessarily indicate that an individual will have difficulties or is unfit for ministry. But it might suggest that effective functioning will take considerable effort or that psychotherapy may be helpful or necessary.

### DYSFUNCTION AND DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

Each stage of human development provides individuals with an opportunity to grow or to differentiate functioning to a higher degree than the previous stage. Specific developmental tasks are noted for each stage. These tasks challenge the individual to proceed further along a given developmental line, be it biological, psychological, or social. Irrespective of the developmental line, tasks tend to be of two types: personal and relational. Failure to deal adequately with these tasks results in either an overdeveloped (hypersexual) or underdeveloped (hyposexual) response. Both forms are referred to by some as a “stunting,” “arresting,” or “fixating” of development that has an immediate effect and also affects functioning at a later stage (or stages) of development—typically late adolescence or early or middle adulthood. This delayed impact is referred to here as “expected resulting adult sexual dysfunction.” Nevertheless, these behaviors can be understood as inappropriate efforts to achieve some measure of union with another.

**Childhood Stage (Ages 0–7).** Research confirms that the capacity for sexual response is present from birth. Biologically, then, infants—and, later, children—actualize this capacity by exploring their sexuality, at first openly and then discreetly as they become aware of family and societal norms governing sexual expression. Psychologically, children begin to develop a sense of trust and experience other people and the world as positive and consistent, largely because of an already developing secure attachment style. Furthermore, they begin to learn to differentiate self from others and to cope with the anxiety and uncertainty associated with early separation-individuation experiences. This coping is accomplished in a number of ways, most notably by learning to self-soothe, initially through finger sucking and later with transitional objects such as favorite blankets or stuffed animals associated with safety and security (i.e., parents or caregivers). Socially, children begin to learn adult roles and expected behaviors through modeling. They then practice these gender roles and behaviors by “playing house.” By age three, a gender identity will begin to be expressed. Typically, children form a “best friend” relationship in which they can risk sharing secrets and personal dreams with another, usually a child of similar age and the same sex, without being criticized or having the secret breached. Spiritually, it has been suggested that in utero, children experience union; following birth, they cling to the mother or caregiver to recapture that sense of union by merging with or sharing in the mother’s sense of self. As the process of separation-individuation begins, it appears that children form a God-image, or a divine internal representation of their union with God, as it reflects their attachment with their parents—that is, either a secure and caring maternal attachment and a secure and caring image of God, or an insecure attachment to uncaring parents with a negative view of sexuality and an image of God as uncaring and guilt-inducing. The basic personal task at this stage is self-soothing, while the basic relational task is to form a concept of committed, long-term relationships (e.g., marriage) and to practice gender roles.

Expected resulting adult sexual dysfunctions at this stage usually include an overdeveloped or hypersexual response (e.g., sexual preoccupation and fantasies) or the undeveloped or hyposexual response called asexuality (i.e., little or no sexual arousal or desire).

**Preadolescence Stage (Ages 8–12).** At this stage, children tend to congregate and play in separate or homosocial groups (i.e., girls separated from boys). Such a separation means that sexual exploration at

this stage tends to involve individuals of the same gender. Children also begin experiencing the onset of hormonal changes, secondary sex characteristics, and feelings of sexual attraction. Psychologically, the children in this stage begin to deal with body-image changes. They also experience self-mastery. Later in this stage, involvement in heterosexual parties and group dating begin to occur. Spiritually, individuals at this stage tend to incorporate religious attitudes and prohibitions about sexuality into their previously assimilated familial and social norms and prohibitions, and this may be reflected in their God-image. The result is that guilt feelings and shame may intensify. The basic personal task at this stage is to develop an increasing sense of self-mastery that includes self-discipline and perseverance. The basic relational task is to begin forming the capacity to maintain close relationships.

Expected resulting adult sexual dysfunctions at this stage typically include overdeveloped or hypersexual behaviors such as pedophilia, interest in child pornography, compulsive masturbation, or other paraphilias. An undeveloped or hyposexual response may include superficial sexual relating (i.e., relating to adults of the other gender in a markedly superficial, overly solicitous, or ambivalent manner).

**Adolescence Stage (Ages 13–19).** Puberty is the early part of adolescence, during which the individual becomes functionally capable of reproduction. A hormonal surge during puberty leads to heightened sexual interest. For most individuals, sexual experiences begin during this stage. These include sexual fantasies and genital exploration (e.g., masturbation, petting, intercourse). The majority of adolescents begin to masturbate at least occasionally, and approximately 50 percent experiment with heterosexual intercourse. Between 5 and 10 percent of males and 6 percent of females report having sexual experiences with a person of the same gender. Psychologically, adolescents begin to develop a stable sense of self and begin constellating a personal identity, which includes a sexual identity and sexual orientation. Socially, adolescents begin to relate with a respect for boundaries and equality to others, regardless of age, gender, or ethnicity. Spiritually, as their capacity for abstract thought and analysis emerges, previously accepted religious beliefs may be questioned and discarded. At the same time, adolescents may more deeply experience a longing and desire for transcendent experiences, which can be satisfied to some extent with music or experimentation with drugs and other mind-altering substances. Through experimentation, they may experience transcendence in sexual orgasm, possibly enhanced by drugs or other

disinhibiting substances, which may be a source of guilt or great delight. The basic personal task at this stage is to develop a stable sense of self in the context of conflicting social influences, while the basic relational task is to establish and maintain a basic level of emotional intimacy. Emotional intimacy involves communicating and sharing both positive and negative feelings with another, usually a close friend or friends. Needless to say, such sharing is not without considerable risk of being teased, criticized, or having personal information broadcasted to others. Adolescents who have not had a best friend in childhood are somewhat at a disadvantage and may not even attempt such sharing.

Expected resulting adult sexual dysfunctions at this stage typically include such hypersexual behaviors as ephebophilia (the developmental stage of the abused person is that of adolescence), adolescent pornography, compulsive masturbation, Don Juanism (i.e., achieving sexual conquests with adult females), or other paraphilias.

**Early Adulthood Stage (Ages 20–39).** Throughout this stage, the individual has the opportunity to further develop sexual maturity. Biologically, young adults begin to forge a sexual lifestyle (i.e., celibacy, commitment to marriage, or promiscuity). Psychologically, they begin to further establish professional identity and competence and to forge a career path compatible with their interests and talents. A further developmental task is to increase their capacity for critical reflection, which will foster the completion of university education and success in subsequent employment. During this period, individuals are also challenged to develop their capacity for critical social consciousness, which is to say that they become increasingly aware of the impact of institutions and social sin on individuals, particularly the poor and marginalized. Not surprisingly, the more overly focused the individual is on career, the greater the likelihood that he or she will have delays in the development of this capacity. Socially, young adults begin to deepen commitments to relationships, balancing competition and cooperation. Spiritually, they may find their image of God shifting to a healthier, more life-giving, and more inclusive image (e.g., God can be masculine and feminine, weak and strong)—or the image can remain the same. They may get in closer touch with their deepest desires or longings for unity, which takes the form of both transcendence and intimacy. Establishing and maintaining a close, committed friendship can satisfy much of this desire for intimacy, while becoming more in touch with nature may help satisfy the desire for transcendence. Although prayer may be a part of the young adult's life,



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and more whole**

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it tends to become a lower priority or perceived value. The basic personal task at this stage is to further integrate or constellate the various facets of self-identity—personal, professional, and social—while the basic relational task is to increase communication and empathic responding in intimate relationships. This is often a major challenge for males, who have overidentified with the masculine function.

Sexual dysfunctions at this stage typically include problems with sexual desire or sexual performance, as well as the full range of hypersexual and hyposexual behaviors noted earlier.

**Middle Adulthood Stage (Ages 40–65).** Biologically, adults are challenged to deal with menopause or with andropause (its male equivalent) and its meaning and consequences for their lives. Decreased sexual desire, arousal and performance, lower energy, longer healing time after illnesses and injuries, loss of muscle mass, and associated signs of aging are painful realities and insults to an individual's sense of self and self-esteem. At this stage, a major challenge is to accept these physical changes as a call to focus on one's interior life while maintaining a healthful lifestyle. Psychologically, the major task is to become more fully the person one is meant to be by becoming more single-minded, more loving and caring, and more whole. This means achieving better balance between autonomy and intimacy and between self-interest and self-surrender. Socially, adults at this stage engage in generative behaviors (e.g., giving back to the

community through volunteer activities). Spiritually, the task is to develop spiritual intimacy. Individuals can respond to the dual desire and longing for intimacy and transcendence by becoming more sensitive to relationships by putting others' needs and interests first and by becoming more meditative and prayerful. Individuals in this stage are more attracted to centering prayer and related forms of meditation than in previous stages. The basic personal task at this stage is to become more centered and balanced, while the basic relational task is to reconfirm one's basic sexual lifestyle option. For most priests this is celibacy—that is, if they follow an integrative developmental trajectory.

Sexual dysfunction at this stage typically includes problems with sexual desire or sexual performance. It can include the full range of hypersexual and hyposexual behaviors noted previously. Unique to this stage is an experience of social isolation, loneliness, and depression that often reflects a nonintegrative sense of sexuality.

#### **DEVELOPMENT IN THREE PRIESTS**

We return to the three cases noted earlier. The relevant predisposing and developmental markers described illustrate the development path or trajectory taken by each of these men, from birth through the present time in their priestly ministries.

**Father Jim Gilliam.** From the time his mother's pregnancy was confirmed, Jim was loved and cherished by his parents. His prenatal phase and birth were uneventful, and his easy temperament and secure bonding with his mother seemed to facilitate his becoming the center of his parents' affection and attention. Furthermore, he was their firstborn son. Their attitudes toward intimacy and sexuality were positive. When it was appropriate, Jim's father discussed sex and sexual awakening with him. Jim was on target for all his biological and psychological developmental milestones. His gender identity as masculine was evident at age 3. He played with neighborhood children, becoming a leader of sorts, and had a best friend beginning at age 5. In his middle-school years he related with relative ease with both boys and girls, attending parties and engaging in group dating by his second year of high school. He reported sexual fantasies involving girls his age when he was 12 and engaged in occasional masturbation starting at age 13. If a hormonal assay had been available, it would likely have indicated normal testosterone levels. He was an honor student, active in school sports, continued to date through high school, and was a class leader. There was a certain charm,

transparency, and sensitivity about him that made it easy for others, both students and faculty, to like him and enjoy his company. By his late teens, his sexual orientation and identity were clearly heterosexual. While he had some concerns about celibacy, he was pretty sure he wanted to be a priest, like his paternal uncle. He entered the diocesan minor seminary after high school. Looking back, it was evident that he was able to reasonably manage physical and emotional intimacy and had made a reasonably informed decision about the sexual option of celibacy prior to his ordination. Throughout his parish ministry, he was considered an effective sacramental minister and a balanced pastoral administrator, and he was well liked by his parishioners. The 1980s were a difficult time for him, as some of his closest priest colleagues left to marry and raise families. During this period of soul-searching, he reaffirmed his commitment to celibacy. After this “dark night,” he seemed to experience renewed energy and passion for his pastoral responsibilities.

**Father John Steffin.** While John Steffin’s prenatal life and birth were uneventful, his parents—farmers who were financially strained by a recent drought and a downturn in the economy—were ambivalent about the pregnancy. John’s slow-to-warm temperament was not a good fit for his mother’s impatience and emotional distancing. Needless to say, the avoidant attachment style that characterized the bond between John and his mother was further reinforced by the social isolation John experienced as a child. The farm was in a remote rural area, and consequently, John had no regular playmates in his first six years of life. When the farm failed, the family moved to the city, where his father took a factory job, and John attended first grade at a Catholic school. While his teacher was warm and inclusive, John was one of 35 students in the class. John’s reluctance to join in playground activities with his peers further accentuated his separateness. Needless to say, he was teased as “the hick from the sticks.” This teasing was very hurtful to John. Rather than strike back verbally or by fighting, he retreated to the safety of the role of “bookworm” and class “brain.” His parents’ attitudes about sex were decidedly negative. When John’s mother caught him, at age 7, in his room stimulating his penis, she rebuked him, saying that he should “never do such an evil thing again.” John, deeply shamed by this experience, obeyed her: he never masturbated or engaged in any other sexual exploration again. John’s father never thought to talk to his son about sex and sexuality, and there was no sex education in schools at the time. John’s only knowledge of sex came from a book

he read for a class report. Nevertheless, he did identify rather strongly with his father, as reflected by John’s early gender identity as masculine. He also identified with a highly intelligent priest on the seminary faculty who was a weekend associate at the family’s parish. It was that priest who eventually encouraged John to enter the seminary after graduation from high school. In his middle-school years, John developed a friendship with two other boys who were similarly intellectually inclined and nonathletic. In high school, he graduated as valedictorian of his class.

John had never dated in high school and could not recall ever having sexual fantasies involving either sex or engaging in any sexual behaviors. Had a hormonal assay been available, it would likely have indicated low testosterone levels.

When John announced his decision to enter the seminary, his mother was overjoyed, saying it was the happiest day of her life. While John knew his parents were practicing Catholics, his mother had never communicated her wish that John would become a priest and “bring down blessings on this family.” John’s days in the seminary were idyllic. He excelled in classes and easily tolerated the strict regimen of seminary life in the 1960s. This is not to say that John was always pleasant and easygoing; on the contrary, his irritability and moodiness were quite evident. Nevertheless, while others could not understand the prohibition against “particular friendships,” John was content to spend time during breaks discussing ideas with some of his more intellectually oriented peers. He imagined his life as a priest on the seminary faculty or in some specialized role such as a canon lawyer, although he realized that he would have to spend some time “on the line” in a parish assignment, at least for a while. Even though the seminary formation team had some concerns about John’s apparent shyness, they were impressed with his intellectual capability (he was the top student in his class) and the fact that he had no obvious issues about sexuality or celibacy.

Neither John nor his bishop realized how difficult his first parish assignment would be. While John would preach adequately, he often came across to parishioners who questioned him as a cold, uncaring, and unconcerned cleric who could be irritable, moody, and even downright inhospitable. During the early postconciliar era, when there were high expectations for collaboration between priests and laity, John’s attitude toward the newly elected parish council was highly critical and disparaging. Parishioners were upset, and the pastor, who had high hopes for both John and the prospects of having an active parish council, was very discouraged. Furthermore, John was an absolute failure in his youth ministry re-



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## Today there is growing awareness that the screening of candidates for ministry must include, among other things, a thorough sexual history

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sponsibilities. After eight months in that assignment, the pastor urgently requested that John be removed as soon as possible. Although he was scheduled for graduate study in two more years, the diocese moved up the time line and arranged for that assignment to begin at the end of that year.

**Father Andy Sharff.** Mrs. Sharff was thrilled to hear that she was pregnant. Although her husband was seldom home because of business, he too looked forward to beginning a family. The pregnancy was somewhat problematic, and Andy was born four weeks prematurely—probably because of Mrs. Sharff's drug and alcohol use throughout pregnancy. Andy's difficult temperament was not a good fit for his mother, who was anxious and impatient. While she really wanted to give Andy all her love and concern, her anxiety and inconsistent efforts were reflected in the anxious-ambivalent attachment style that developed between them. Parental attitudes toward both sexuality and drug use were quite liberal. Both his parents drank regularly, and his mother used a variety of prescription "uppers" and "downers." As a youngster, Andy was allowed to play with other children, but was regularly told to "keep family business to yourself." Andy assumed that this meant he shouldn't talk about his parents' drinking and arguments or the men who visited his mother when his father was away on business. Andy complied. Even when he was fondled by one of

these men on several occasions just before he turned 13, he told no one. Although initially frightened, he enjoyed the experience and began to masturbate once or more a day thereafter. While he knew most of the kids in the area, he never really had a best friend. In his middle-school years he did attend some mixed parties and engaged in group dating, but his attraction was more toward boys. From his early adolescence, Andy recalled overhearing his parents fighting about many matters, including their infidelity. The only sexual education and advice his father gave him was to "use protection and don't get 'em pregnant." While Andy was angry that his father knew so little about him and his sexual attraction, he couldn't talk to him about these matters. He experienced a nagging sense of guilt over both his masturbation and the sexual molestation, which was reinforced by the sexual ethics he learned in his Catholic elementary and high-school religion classes. He reported sexual fantasies involving boys his age when he was 12. While he had masturbated occasionally since age 9, he now masturbated almost daily starting at age 13. If a hormonal assay had been available, it would likely have indicated high testosterone levels.

Although he had high intellectual capabilities, Andy was only an average student. He was very active in all school sports and enjoyed hanging around the locker room with his teammates. Still, he had time for student council activities and, more because of his popularity than because of any particular talents or accomplishments, he was elected student council president in his senior year. By his late teens, his sexual orientation and identity seemed to be primarily homosexual, with sexual fantasies and arousal primarily involving young adolescent males.

Uncertain about his future and confused about his sexuality, Andy was easily recruited by the diocesan seminary. His mother was surprised, since Andy had never mentioned any such interest, but she was pleased. To the screening committee, Andy appeared to be a bright, handsome young man who was socially adept. Detailed inquiry would have disclosed that he had only limited capacity for mature, intimate relationships and that he was developmentally arrested sexually. When he learned he was admitted, he breathed a sigh of relief, for now he believed he could control his sexual urges by giving himself fully to God and to God's work. He felt grateful to be in a secure environment for the first time in his life, and easily rose to be one of the top students in his class. While he had some attraction to his fellow seminarian, his sexual fantasies, when he gave in to them, were about young adolescent boys. Once he managed to bring the matter of these desires to his spiritual director. The only advice he was given was to

“pray, and masturbate if you have to, and then leave the rest to God.”

His first ministry assignment was to a parish, and because of his apparent talent in working with youth, he was asked to teach at one of the diocese's coeducational high schools. For the first fifteen years or so he had little difficulty with sexual matters. However, in the months following his mother's sudden death from what was surmised to be a drug overdose, Andy seemed to become increasingly preoccupied with sexual desire and arousal involving young adolescent males. Andy subsequently sustained very discreet sexual encounters with six adolescents at the school. These he picked from those who came to him for counseling; they were from single-parent families, were loners, and had problems with low self-esteem.

### INEVITABILITY OR CHOICE?

It may seem that the developmental trajectory of Father Sharff's life would inevitably result in his ephebophilic behavior, or that Father Gilliam was destined to become a model of psychological and sexual integration. The reality is that predisposing factors as well as developmental factors do exert considerable influence on developmental outcomes, much as a sapling that is bent and secured has a high probability of becoming a leaning tree. But the fact remains that just as a bent sapling can be pulled back and secured in an upright position, so too can individuals refocus their developmental trajectory.

For instance, Gilliam certainly appears to have had ideal parenting and many of the wholesome childhood and adolescent experiences that foster optimal development. Nevertheless, there were countless decision points in his life—on a daily basis—in which his practice of healthy and virtuous behaviors reinforced the growth-focused developmental path that he continues to traverse. Despite his early developmental advantages, Gilliam could have made a series of everyday decisions that could have shifted his developmental trajectory in a less-healthy direction over time. Similarly, despite Sharff's high hormonal levels and molestation by an adult acquaintance, his eventual ephebophilic acting-out behavior was also influenced by a series of decisions on his part and,

quite possibly, on the part of his superiors. For example, he could have decided to decline the bishop's offer of a full-time ministry position that put him “in harm's way,” or he could have decided to seek help with his compulsive masturbation. That he did not, and that his superiors were either unaware of or unconcerned about his sexual predilection, is telling. Granted, such choices require a certain degree of courage and resolve. Nevertheless, grace and the awareness and concern of others can be and often are operative at such decision points. Thankfully, today there is growing awareness that the screening of candidates for ministry must include, in addition to a full psychological test battery, a detailed developmental history, from prenatal life through the present; a spiritual history, work history, and criminal background check; and a thorough sexual history taken by someone with significant clinical experience in assessing the various markers of psychosexual development. Had such a screening protocol been followed when John Steffin and Andy Sharff were applying for seminary admission, a decision for nonacceptance might have been made.

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# Formative Places and Relationships

*Reverend William P. Sheridan, M. Div.*

**I**n the days following September 11, 2001, many people from the New York metropolitan area and various other parts of the United States made visits to the site of the terrorist attacks upon the World Trade Center—a site that quickly became known as Ground Zero. People came to see the actual devastation to lower Manhattan, to quietly reflect upon the tragedy, and to memorialize the dead. Ground Zero became an important national, emotional, and spiritual symbol.

The fact that certain places take on added significance is no strange phenomenon to people of faith. Most of the world's faith traditions have what they honor as special places. Jerusalem, for instance, has special meaning for Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Mecca is a holy place for Muslims. Frequently, in the Old Testament, places were set aside by the Israelites as consecrated to Yahweh and given a pertinent name. Christians have traditionally honored the graves of the martyrs and constructed churches over special locations.

What is true of faith traditions and nations is also true of individuals. Certain locations have particular importance to us. Places are part of our individual emotional and spiritual landscapes. From the highly meaningful places that mark past struggles, joys, and triumphs to the everyday location and context of our

work, where we have been and where we are now are important.

Ministerial location is more than simply the place where we work. It is the site of our significant pastoral relationships and the place where we encounter God. Given that many priests and religious also reside where they minister, the location of ministry has added personal, social, and psychological meaning as well. The places of our ministerial past, the places where we are currently ministering, and the places in which we will minister in the future have a formative role in shaping us.

What I am proposing here could be applied to priests, religious, and other ministers. Because my experience has been within the diocesan priesthood, I will address the topic within that context. In *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests* (2001), the United States Catholic Conference reminds priests that formation for ministry does not end when one has left the seminary:

To say that ongoing formation is “continuing” simply identifies it as a life-long task or process. That is why the documents often speak of “permanent” formation. It truly is co-extensive with life itself. We never stop growing or being transformed. For many, the word “integration” may either be vague or seem to reduce spirituality to psychological processes. In the context of ongoing

formation, integration is quite specific and spiritual. It signals the movement toward a unity of life that draws together and dynamically relates who we are, what we do, and what we are about (our purpose or mission).

Formation and all that contributes to it constitute a broad reality. Along with who we are, what we do, and what we are about, one could easily add the importance of *where* one does this as significant to one's formation. The bishops speak of "a unity of life" in regard to formation; this means that there is a wide umbrella over the formative experience.

In a subsection entitled, "Priestly Identity," the bishops discuss the importance of culture to ongoing formation, maintaining that culture "is not only a tool that people use to shape the world, but the collective values and attitudes that shape people." Part of one's cultural reality is the place or location where one lives and works. Though places have an importance in and of themselves, they become even more important when one examines the relationships to people connected with such places. Each ministerial location has its own collection of people who interact in that place. Each person or group of people, as the bishops relate, has "values and attitudes" that have the power to shape or form reality. It is helpful, therefore, to reflect upon the formative nature of places, and of the relationships associated with those places, to the ministry. I would like to focus on three specific realities: nurturing places and relationships, challenging places and relationships, and sacred places and relationships.

## NURTURING PLACES AND RELATIONSHIPS

In his novel *Jim the Boy*, Tony Earley describes the enormous significance that a place can have on a person's development. The story focuses on 10-year-old Jim Glass, who is being raised by his widowed mother, Cissy, and his three uncles, Zeno, Coran, and Al. Jim grows up in Aliceville, North Carolina, where he learns about the importance of home, family, and faith. In beautiful ways, Jim's mother and uncles teach him about the virtues of honesty, integrity, and courage. Aliceville is a safe place. On one occasion, Jim's uncle Al brings him on an exciting journey outside Aliceville to Charlotte. Although Jim is a bit frightened about the prospect of leaving what is familiar, he is also drawn to mystery. Early writes of Jim's thoughts while on the road:

Jim knew that the people who lived in those houses were sitting down to supper and talking about the day. They worked in the cotton fields through which Jim and Uncle Al traveled. Jim studied the farms carefully; each served as last outpost along a moving frontier. Two thoughts came to Jim at once, joined by a thread of

amazement: he thought, *People live here*, and he thought, *They don't know who I am*. At that moment the world opened up around Jim like hands that, until that moment, had been cupped around him; he felt very small, almost invisible, in the open air of their center, but he knew that the hands would not let him go. It was almost like flying. The expansion strips in the road bumped under the wheels of the truck in a rhythm that said, "Char-Lotte, Char-Lotte, Char-Lotte."

Living in a place that is nurturing is like being held in hands that will not let go. There may be hesitation and fear along the way, but they will ultimately lead to an opening toward mystery, while shaping confidence at the same time. One feels safe in the hands of God.

Having a ministerial assignment where one feels nurtured and free to experiment and grow is a grace. Nurturing places and relationships help form the minister through helpful opportunities to grow. Though many factors go into distinguishing a place as "nurturing," I would like to concentrate on three basic criteria. An assignment is nurturing when the place and the people encourage positive engagement with the ministry, when the type of ministry fits one's personality and abilities, and when the ministerial relationships are supportive. Clearly, there are no perfect ministerial assignments. Sometimes adjusting our expectations in this regard is the first step toward allowing an assignment to form us. This is what the bishops are referring to in *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests* when they say the realities of integration should be considered "signals" toward establishing "a unity of life."

Often, experiences and opportunities that are outside our initial expectations can serve as signals to embrace a different and more decisive commitment to the ministry. Experience is a great teacher, and places that enable us to cultivate a disposition of openness lead to enrichment and maturity. Each event and every person who drifts into our ministry can speak to us of God, but we need to be able to hear them. Nurturing places open up the "ears" of our minds and hearts.

**Positive Engagement.** To maintain that a place is nurturing when it encourages a positive engagement with the ministry points to the fact that the priest is empowered to listen more attentively to God's word and action in his own life and the lives of others. The mind and heart, in this instance, are focused in such a way as to recognize God's presence in the work and relationships of ministry. One cares deeply for those to whom and with whom one ministers, and one's mind and heart are committed to the ministry. Positive engagement with the ministry, then, is a far



different reality than simple contentment or comfort in a given assignment. One can find a niche and feel content and comfortable in a place while lacking a connection to the dynamic and life-expanding reality characteristic of positive engagement.

A few reflections from my first parochial assignment may serve as examples of the benefits to having the mind and heart positively engaged as a result of a particular placement. I remember one spiritual direction appointment I had as a newly ordained priest. I was recounting to my director some stories and experiences from the parish, but was speaking in a rather superficial manner that lacked deeper engagement. After listening quietly (and very patiently) for over forty minutes to my list of "I said," "he said," and "she said" lamentations, my director looked me squarely in the eye and said, "You know Bill, you can be incredibly boring at times." He followed this by asking me, "What are you currently reading?" I then fruitlessly searched my mind, trying to find anything of substance to discuss regarding what I was reading. It was through this uncharacteristically pointed remark that I came to understand that good spiritual and theological reading, for me, are essential to rescuing me from a mundane approach to my ministry. Ministry should be anything but boring. It can and should speak of life in Christ Jesus. To effectively minister, one's mind and thought must become more and more drawn into this life.

It has been my experience that I am happiest as a priest when both my mind and heart are firmly rooted and committed to where I am ministering. I remember being extremely embarrassed at a wake for a young man from our parish whom I had visited through his long battle with cancer. Holding back tears, I began the prayer service, but I was unable to continue. Then, seemingly from nowhere, one of my brother priests from the parish appeared, grabbed the funeral ritual out of my hands, and began the service. When I apologized later to the young man's widow, she said, "Are you kidding, Father? It just demonstrates how much you loved him. Thank you for being there for him, and thank you for being here for us." Upon reflection, I realized that I had much to be grateful for: a brother priest who knew I was having a difficult time with this particular death and cared enough to follow me to the wake to make sure I was all right, as well as parishioners who could so easily and honestly articulate their feelings to me. Being confronted by one who cared for me in spiritual direction, being assisted by a fellow minister in a time of need, and being encouraged by one to whom I ministered all led to an inner acknowledgment that I was in a nurturing place. Events like these and so many others gave shape and form to my early priest-

hood; this was indeed a place where my mind and heart were positively engaged in the work of the Lord.

**Types of Ministry.** If one feels individually suited for a particular type of ministry, one is more likely to experience such an assignment as nurturing. Having one's personality and abilities taken seriously and used for the betterment of the church is exciting. The excitement comes from a sense of being used as an instrument in God's divine plan. We see firsthand that our contributions and efforts make a difference in the lives of other people. This not only bolsters our self-esteem but also puts us into contact with the Holy Spirit within. We experience ourselves as called by name.

In my thirteen years as a priest, I have served in parishes and in specialized ministries centering on administration of or concern for institutions. In truth, I have found the parish setting and parochial life better suited to my personality. The diversity of parish life and the potential to enter intimately into the lives of families and individuals through ministry certainly makes the parish a nurturing place for me. For others, however, being part of a larger institution with clear-cut objectives and goals draws them into the mystery of the church's universality. Finding the right type of ministry and the place to exercise it is often the most important movement toward the "unity of life" mentioned by the bishops.

Through many conversations with priests, I also know that this can be the most trying of the three criteria for nurturance. To a large degree, being an ordained priest means addressing needs. We pledge ourselves to assisting the bishop in the task of guiding the church. Plainly, there are times when our desire to undertake a particular type of ministry may be in conflict with the greater needs of the church, or when the availability of such a ministerial placement is limited. It is painful for a priest not to be where he feels he would be most happy and effective. Resolving this tension requires prayerful discernment (which I will turn to later) and a relationship of mutuality with those in authority.

**Supportive Ministerial Relationships.** It is fundamental to the ministerial dynamic that the most profound elements in being nurtured will come in and through our relationships to the people with whom and to whom we minister. Through their expectations, both reasonable and unreasonable, it is the people who most influence our continuing formation. Relationships that are respectful, mutual, and supportive play a crucial role in experiencing a specific place as nurturing. The fact that many priests also live where they work or minister gives added

importance to their ministerial location. If the relationships in that place foster further growth and maturity, the place we are located takes on added significance.

Rectories and placements that are home to healthy dialogue regarding ministry and common life together create a nurturing place for human development. Healthy dialogue usually emerges from shared values and a common concern for the ministry of Christ. There may not be full agreement on an acceptable course of action, or complete uniformity of thought, but a nurturing environment will be one in which all the members are valued for who they are and what they contribute. I have been a part of many decisions that went in a direction contrary to my stated preference, but I felt that my opinions and feelings were taken seriously and given merit. On those occasions, I was able to more readily go along with the course decided upon because I was given the opportunity to enter into dialogue.

We cannot underestimate the role that those to whom we minister play in shaping and forming us. A consistent thread that weaves through any ministerial tapestry is the reality of the trust and openness that those to whom we minister exhibit toward us. I have been truly humbled, as most priests have, by the trust and confidence placed in me by people who in some cases did not even know me. Patients in hospitals, penitents in confessionals, people seeking sacramental preparation or counseling, and those grieving the loss of a loved one have, on countless occasions, thrown open the doors to the most intimate and vulnerable aspects of their lives and, in those moments, shaped and formed me as a priest. Their courage and willingness to make themselves open to Christ working through me has challenged me to reach deep within myself and to do likewise and entrust myself to Jesus. This kind of trust is learned, and credit must go to the generations of priests, religious, and other ministers who have ministered to the needs of the church with distinction and reverence. The greatest sadness regarding the recent scandals of clergy sexual abuse is the loss of innocence perpetrated upon the young and the subsequent corrosion of trust and confidence in the church's ministers. What were, in many cases, places of nurture have been left desolate places of dark accusation, corruption, and sin. Only renewed relationships of protection, honesty, and reverence can heal the rift.

## CHALLENGING PLACES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Many in ministry know of the great pain and sorrow experienced by those who minister in unhealthy or destructive places. We have all heard the horror

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**A consistent thread  
that weaves through  
any ministerial tapestry  
is the reality of the trust  
and openness that those  
to whom we minister  
exhibit toward us**

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stories of priests assigned to places where there are clearly dysfunctional situations. Many labor under extremely stressful conditions that start to pull apart the cohesiveness of their "unity of life." The newly ordained are sometimes placed with absentee pastors; some priests must grapple with the alcoholism or drug addition of a fellow minister; others find themselves ministering with celibates who do not honor the commitment, or trying to work with abusive and nasty personality types. These are some of the more unfortunate scenarios that can be a part of ministry—and they are also a sad part of the lives of many individuals and families. It is not a sign of unhealthy self-absorption or selfishness for the minister to desire a change in assignment when confronted with such harsh realities. The danger of being sucked into such dysfunction is too high, and the priest must weigh carefully the awful cost that comes with remaining. Destructive situations like these are very complex and usually cannot be dealt with on one's own. Even if one needs to remain or is unable to leave, it is to one's benefit to utilize the resources of the church and solicit the assistance of others.

Some ministerial assignments are experienced as more of a mixed reality. A priest may be assigned, for example, with someone who is truly difficult to work with, but may find other aspects of the ministry in that location rewarding and life-giving. One may struggle terribly with a particular type of ministry but really enjoy the relationships that are fostered. Honest differences of opinion regarding the conduct of the ministry and the course a parish or group should take are a part of many, if not all, pastoral place-



ments. One may also find that those to whom one ministers demand more and more of one's time and energy. Expectations rise, but there seems to be no reciprocating sensitivity toward the priest and the extra effort he has already expended. All of these realities add to the stress and tension that many encounter in ministry.

A degree of stress and tension will be present in any assignment because stress and tension are part of everyday life. As one of my friends recently remarked, "Nonsense is a part of everyone's life; it's just a matter of finding one particular brand or type of nonsense more acceptable than another." He said this jokingly, but the observation has merit. Since most priests do not experience their assignments as purely good or purely bad, it is necessary to remain attentive to our minds and hearts as we minister. Stress and tension, however, have the potential to be the signals of integration mentioned by the bishops, which play an important role in forming us. What might they be signaling to us? One thing is certain: priests need to be careful listeners in these situations. Slowing ourselves down to "hear" the signals will help us to be prudent and prevent us from making rash decisions or sudden moves. Two helpful and interconnected practices can assist us in remaining attentive to our minds and hearts while ministering in challenging places or within challenging relationships: first, keeping one's reflection on the ministry Christ-centered, and second, entering into the practice of ongoing spiritual discernment. These two practices serve to settle our minds and hearts and point to God's presence among us.

**Keeping One's Reflection on Ministry Christ-Centered.** It is the Lord Jesus who calls the priest into service. This fundamental reality of vocation must never be forgotten or underestimated. Acknowledging that we are about the Lord's work in ministry helps us avoid the pitfalls of adopting an overly possessive stance toward our work. Stepping back from this inclination is really what the great spiritual masters meant by "detachment." One can remain positively engaged with the ministry without smothering it or stifling it only if one is detached enough to let the Spirit breathe through it. Detachment, therefore, is not a cold-hearted, unemotional, or distant stance toward the ministry; rather, it is a humble recognition of God's salvific will and a submission to God's initiative.

One of the spiritual directors at our diocesan seminary used to tell the story of his early days in the priesthood. He related his developing awareness of the need to let Jesus be at the center of his ministry: "As a young priest, I used to say, 'Lord, I've got a problem with so and so, or I've got a tough situation

here in the parish.'" But, he continued, "After a few years in the ministry I began saying, 'Lord, *you've* got a problem with so and so, or *you've* got a problem here in the parish.'" He claimed that this change in context and orientation made all the difference in how he regarded himself and the ministry from that point on. This type of disposition also helps enliven one's prayer, because stressors and tensions become shared concerns rather than lonely complaints.

Ministering in challenging places and from within challenging relationships often entails a significant amount of suffering. Suffering, as difficult and unwanted as it is, can serve as a potential signal toward deeper formation. It is generally understood that it would be psychologically problematic to seek suffering. Yet Christianity also has a longstanding regard for the spiritual benefits derived from suffering. One need only read the lives of the saints, for example, to examine this regard for suffering. Even in reading the lives of the saints, however, one needs to be sensitive to the limitations of language in describing spiritual experiences. One must also be aware that there are differences between past articulations of spiritual truths and contemporary understandings. To actively desire suffering is one thing; allowing the suffering we inevitable encounter to shape and form us is quite another. An excessive desire for suffering is unhealthy, but so is a compulsive avoidance of any or all suffering. A healthy spirituality charts a middle path, providing suffering its formative role.

Suffering may take a formative role if it unites us to Christ and others in a deeper way. Linking our pain and struggles to those of Christ helps us embrace the Pauline injunction that sets our suffering in the effective role of making up for what is "lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col. 1:24). Jesus did not suffer purely for the sake of suffering but because of its potential to signal his salvific love. In his book *A Priest After My Own Heart*, Michael Fallon discusses what can and should be integrated into our own experiences of suffering, from the sufferings of Christ Jesus. Fallon expresses the dangers of asserting too simplistic an understanding of the Father's role in Jesus' redemptive act on the cross. This enables us to avoid viewing suffering solely as punishment and opens us to recognizing God's presence to us within the suffering. Fallon writes:

Jesus did not discover meaning in the terrible injustice perpetrated against him. He gave it meaning by making of it a gift of himself, a gift of love, and in so doing he revealed who God really is and how we humans are to respond to God whatever the darkness. Truly the "light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1:5). Others brutally took his life, against

the will of God. Jesus, in obedience to God, did not falter but made even his dying a gift of love. It is this point that is being made at the Last Supper . . . By the way Jesus accepted crucifixion, perpetrated upon him by those who were not listening to God, Jesus shows us how we too are to respond to what happens to us. He not only gives us an example, for on our own we would not be able to follow him. He also gives us a share in his own Spirit, the love-communion that binds him to the Father.

This linking of our own suffering to Jesus' creates an intimate link to God. Christ-centered ministry and the suffering that sometimes accompanies it reveal to us the consoling presence of God. Jesus demonstrates that the only effective response to evil and suffering is love. Integrating this love into ministry, though never easy, binds us to the Spirit in God's "love-communion."

Through the challenging places and relationships of our ministry, we not only allow God the Father to gradually form us into the image of his Son; we also establish a possible tie to those to whom we minister. Robert F. Morneau, author of *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*, speaks of a "spirituality of pastoral sharing." He writes:

A spirituality of pastoral sharing also embraces burdens. The tragedy of suicide, the wrenching pain of divorce, the news of cancer, the rejection of a parent or child, the hatred within family systems, the scandals that cause disillusion, the violence that shatters innocence—all come to rest at the feet of the diocesan priest on a weekly basis. Not to be overwhelmed by such weighty issues, not to yield to "compassion fatigue," not to quit are challenges that, if accepted, not only do not weaken one's relationships with God and others but strengthen them many times over.

Allowing this type of suffering to be a signal pointing toward "a unity of life" necessitates listening with our minds and hearts. Once we have heard what some of these challenging voices are telling us, we must subject them to the practice of spiritual discernment.

**Spiritual Discernment.** For many people, discernment is something one enters into when there is a serious or life-changing decision to make. Entering into marriage or a religious vocation, moving into a new and different type of work, relocating one's family, and other important decisions would be brought to spiritual discernment. It is completely understandable and fitting that these decisions would be brought to prayer and spiritual direction. However, entering into spiritual discernment in the midst of ministering in a challenging place or from within a challenging relationship imposes added pressure on

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**The examen, with its five steps, is more than a simple glance at what we have done right or wrong; it is a penetrating probe of our connection to the mystery of God's presence within us**

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the minister. One who is in a challenging situation certainly needs to discern it, but to begin the process while in crisis is difficult. The tendency to seek a quick fix is all too present. Therefore, it is more beneficial for priests and religious to attempt an ongoing spiritual discernment. Obviously, the spiritual discernment will be more intense if one is considering a change in assignment or a move of some sort, but if one has undertaken an ongoing discernment, it will unfold in a more graceful manner.

What form or shape would an ongoing spiritual discernment take? How can one practice it? In his recent book *Quickening the Fire in Our Midst*, George Aschenbrenner furthers his insights into what he calls "mature spirituality" and his Consciousness Examen. He writes, "In a life of mature spirituality, discernment always acknowledges, distinguishes, and then interrelates three different dimensions of human existence: external behavior, inner spontaneity, and what I call the core of the soul." By integrating these three dimensions of human existence, Aschenbrenner maintains, we enter more fully into the mystery that is God. Reflecting on our external behavior on a regular basis, therefore, is essential to spiritual growth and maturity. What we do makes a difference. Being attentive to the inner stirrings of our minds and hearts in a consistent way permits our vulnerability to teach and deepen us. What we think and feel make a difference. Gratitude for all that we know, all that we feel, all that we can-



not understand, and all that we will never be able to articulate puts us in touch with the all-encompassing mystery. Who we are makes a difference. This constant dynamic of love and relationship is always at work within us and outside us, but in order to integrate its language, we must be listening.

Aschenbrenner frequently mentions the need to reflect on our lives and proposes the use of the Consciousness Examen as a trusted method of staying in touch with the spiritual dynamic. The examen, with its five steps, is more than a simple glance at what we have done right or wrong; it is a penetrating probe of our connection to the mystery of God's presence within us. As Aschenbrenner writes, "When examen is related to discernment, it becomes examen of consciousness rather than of conscience." When done on a regular basis, the examen leads us to draw close to the truth of our existence and the revelation that since God made us, he knows exactly how to speak to us. Patterns of behavior, thought, and feeling, rather than being arbitrary, become the path toward recognizing God's face.

Challenging places and relationships become different realities when experienced through the inter-connecting practices of viewing the ministry through a Christ-centered approach linked to regular spiritual discernment. The aspects of the ministry that we personally experience as challenging then get filtered through a deeper knowledge of self and God. This dynamic may not remove the pain and suffering from our ministry, but it will most definitely manifest the presence of God and God's solidarity with us. It will also assist us in attaining a more peaceful and Spirit-filled grasp of our daily lives and its challenges.

## SACRED PLACES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Many things can define a place or relationship as sacred; for our purposes, I am going to use a broad understanding and simply distinguish a place or relationship as sacred when it brings us to a profound encounter with God. Sacred places and relationships can have both a communal significance and a personal importance. I use the phrase "profound encounter with God" because we encounter God every day and in ordinary things. For a place to be sacred, however, means that it consistently and reverently speaks to us of God and provides the setting for a deeper sense of God's presence. Profound encounters with God have lasting effects upon us and, in actuality, shape and form us. Sacred places and relationships are formative because they change our receptivity to spiritual realities and strengthen our trust in God.

For many people, the beauty of nature provides many spectacular sacred places. Oceans, mountain-

tops, majestic forests, and snow-swept fields can all be places where one encounters God's creativity and God's presence. It is often easier to quietly reflect on God and raise our minds and hearts to him when we are in awe before his handiwork. Before making the decision to enter the seminary, I took many long walks outside and sat by the seaside, "talking with the Lord." Some of those places still have intimate meaning for me, and I regard them as sacred. Churches and chapels are sacred places set aside for communal worship and private prayers. The celebration of the eucharist and its reservation in the tabernacle, as well as the beautiful religious art that adorns many churches, help people to commune with God. When I was in the seminary, one of my favorite places to converse with the Lord was the university chapel. It was just next door to the seminary but was a sacred place unto itself. I spend many hours there, wrestling with myself and with God, discerning my vocation. I shed tears of sadness and tears of joy in that place. Even now, when I return to visit there, I am transported back in time and, frequently, transported to the hands of God.

As a priest, I am given the opportunity to set aside a week each year for spiritual retreat. The Carmelite retreat house where I have gone for most of these retreats has become sacred for me. The gospels have many passages in which Jesus and his disciples move apart from others to pray. Retreats are an excellent opportunity to go away and rest awhile and to find some sacred place to focus on one's sacred relationship with God. Daily life is filled with so many distractions and responsibilities that time away helps put things back into perspective. My directed retreat each year has become a time when I can take stock of my life and enter more intensely into prayer, reflection, and journaling. Sacred places allow us to breathe with the Spirit and encounter the Lord within us.

Traditionally, sacred places have been so revered by the faithful that many people have embarked on pilgrimages to such sites. The pilgrimage itself took on a spiritual significance as part of one's encounter with God. For the past four years I have had the privilege to travel with the American Special Children's Pilgrimage Group to Lourdes, France, as the chaplain for their Easter trip. Children with Down syndrome, blindness, deafness, cerebral palsy, and a wide range of neurological difficulties have made the Easter Week pilgrimage. There we join up with an English and Irish group called the Handicapped Children's Pilgrimage Trust. All together, the pilgrimage brings roughly eight or nine thousand people to Lourdes for a week of prayer, processions, and socializing. I have been repeatedly surprised by the spiritual impact the pilgrimage has had on both the children with special



needs and myself. I have been deeply moved by the sights and sounds of this pilgrimage. Whether through late-night candlelit visits to the grotto or singing songs at the large Trust Mass, the pilgrimage has never failed to fill me with an inner gratitude and an inner awareness of God's presence. Though the path that leads to the shrine may be littered with religious gift stores and gaudy souvenirs, the shrine area itself is free of anything that would disturb the prayerfulness and reflective nature of the place.

The children with special needs themselves have been a tremendous witness to the sacredness of all human life. Made in God's image and likeness, they teach, on a daily basis, what it means to share in the sufferings of Christ. After hearing of my experiences with these special young people, a priest friend of mine referred to them as "God's sacraments." After four pilgrimages with them, I can attest that he is correct. They manifest the gospel assertion that vulnerability and simplicity are actually spiritual power. I have never heard a single complaint from these children about the awkward exigencies of traveling with their physical and mental limitations, which at times are considerable. Truthfully, they possess an inner peace that has been fashioned through the furnace of suffering.

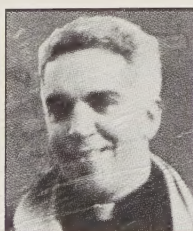
At the beginning of one of the pilgrimages, as is often the case when traveling with a large number of people, our group hit a snag at the airport. Running late for a connecting flight to Paris, we were told that our group would have to be split in two. This became a matter of heated discussion between the airline representatives and us, because our group doctor and nurse needed to have access to the children at all times to administer medications and to be present in case of an emergency. After protracted negotiations, we were still getting nowhere. Already tired from early-morning travel, I found myself getting more and more agitated and was just about ready to jump into the fray when I felt a persistent tugging at the arm of my jacket. It was one of the children from our group with Down syndrome, pulling at my sleeve. Annoyed, I told her, "Wait a minute, I need to go over there and say something." Not to be deterred, she kept tugging. "What is it?" I said. Holding a deck of cards in her hand, and with a smile that would melt the coldest heart, she said, "Father Bill, do you want to play Go Fish?" Looking at the escalating argument and back again to her, I said, "You know what? Yes, I would like to play cards." In the course of our conversation during a wonderful game of Go Fish, she said, "You shouldn't worry so much. They're all nice people over there, and they'll figure it out." She, of course, was right; and they did work it out. Sacred places and relationships enable us to hear and join in God's laughter.

## KNOWING MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE

The places and relationships of our lives shape and form us. As priests and those who minister to others, we must recognize that being attentive to places and relationships is essential to our ministry. In *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*, the bishops urge priests to be aware of what they call "signals" in our ministry and our personal lives that need to be integrated into "a unity of life." It has been my observation that if we are attentive to the nurturing, challenging and sacred places and relationships of our lives, we can more peacefully and resolutely attain this "unity of life." Being attentive to the nurturing places and relationships of ministry builds positive self-esteem and an acknowledgment of God's care and concern for us. Challenging places and relationships call us to integrate suffering, stress, and tension in ways that make them potential signals for areas of growth and spiritual maturity. Sacred places and relationships assist us in being still before the Lord and permit God's love to seize us. Often in our ministry, we become so enmeshed in the demands and difficulties of the work that we frequently lose our awareness of the presence of God. Reflecting on the places and relationships of our ministry, we may find ourselves echoing the words of Jacob, who encountered Yahweh upon waking from a dream: "Surely, God was in this place and I did not know" (Gen. 28:16). Knowing makes all the difference.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Aschenbrenner, G. *Quickening the Fire in Our Midst: The Challenge of Diocesan Priestly Spirituality*. Chicago, Illinois: Loyola Press, 2002.
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- Fallon, M. *A Priest After My Own Heart*. Strathfield, Australia: St. Paul's Publications, 2001.
- Morneau, R. "A Glorious and Transcendent Place." In Cozzens, D. (ed.), *The Spirituality of the Diocesan Priest*. Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997.
- National Conference of Catholic Bishops. *The Basic Plan for the Ongoing Formation of Priests*. Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2001.



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# BOOK REVIEW

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*Contemplatives in Action: The Jesuit Way* by William Barry, S.J., and Robert Doherty, S.J. Paulist Press, 2002. 96 pages. \$11.95.

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**J**oe Slattery, a cantankerous genius who taught us literature in the philosophate, once gave a talk to a group of very young catechists. "I had a dream last night," he growled, "and in it I was a young boy in a spaceship. I was fascinated by all the strange shiny instruments around me. But then I looked out the front window and saw we were hurtling toward a strange planet! I panicked. I called out to the crew, 'Somebody do something! We're going to crash!' And they all looked quizzically at me and said, 'You take care of it. You're the pilot.' I looked around in a frenzy and saw a shelf of books, all of them with scarcely pronounceable titles on astronautics and celestial mechanics. I was trembling, when suddenly my hand fell on a small book entitled *A Boy's Guide on How to Land a Spaceship*. The Bible is a wonderful library of insights into God's will for us, but when you're stuck in a tight situation, that's what the catechism is for."

And that's the purpose this tiny book serves, superlatively, for "the whole Jesuit thing." It distills not only the Spiritual Exercises and the compendious Constitutions but also the complex simplicity of the soul of Ignatius Loyola, which energizes them. What's more, with brevity and candor, it confronts the antagonisms that shaped the Society of Jesus over the last four centuries. Despite its brevity, this is not just a glossary of terms Jesuits bandy about like computer whizzes ("indifference," "discernment," "the magis") or a skeletal outline; it delves into the energizing soul that has animated the Society.

Authors Barry and Doherty are well prepared for their task, having served for years as instructors of Jesuit tertians—men who have completed the entire Jesuit course of studies and a few years of service as ordained priests. They return for a year to reexperience the study and prayer they underwent as callow novices, not only to recapture an academic appreciation of the Society and its self-understanding but also to examine their more mature hearts and turn them into firebrands. This book refines that experience into a mere 90 pages.

The Jesuit spirit is ignited by the frictions between seemingly incompatible polar opposites: the tensions between prayer and action (captured in the paradoxical title), between companionship and mission, between obedience and experience in the trenches, between the centralized papacy and its distant responsibilities, between the need for intellectual rigor and "the language of the heart," between poverty and the needful use of this world's goods, between celibacy and genuinely loving service. This small book gives not just an intellectual understanding of facts about the Society but also a feel for the energizing effects of fusing those conflicting tensions.

The root purpose of "the Jesuit Way" is "to help souls"—not to secure them from some future fiery hell or to corral them into the one true church but to save them from atrophy here and now, "to give life, and give it more abundantly," "finding God in all things"—especially the least inviting and promising.

I would urge every Jesuit president to buy this book in bulk and give a copy to every one of his or her trustees, to every lay colleague, and even to a Jesuit here or there who may have forgotten or misplaced that feeling of zest at the core of being a Jesuit.

—William O'Malley, S.J.



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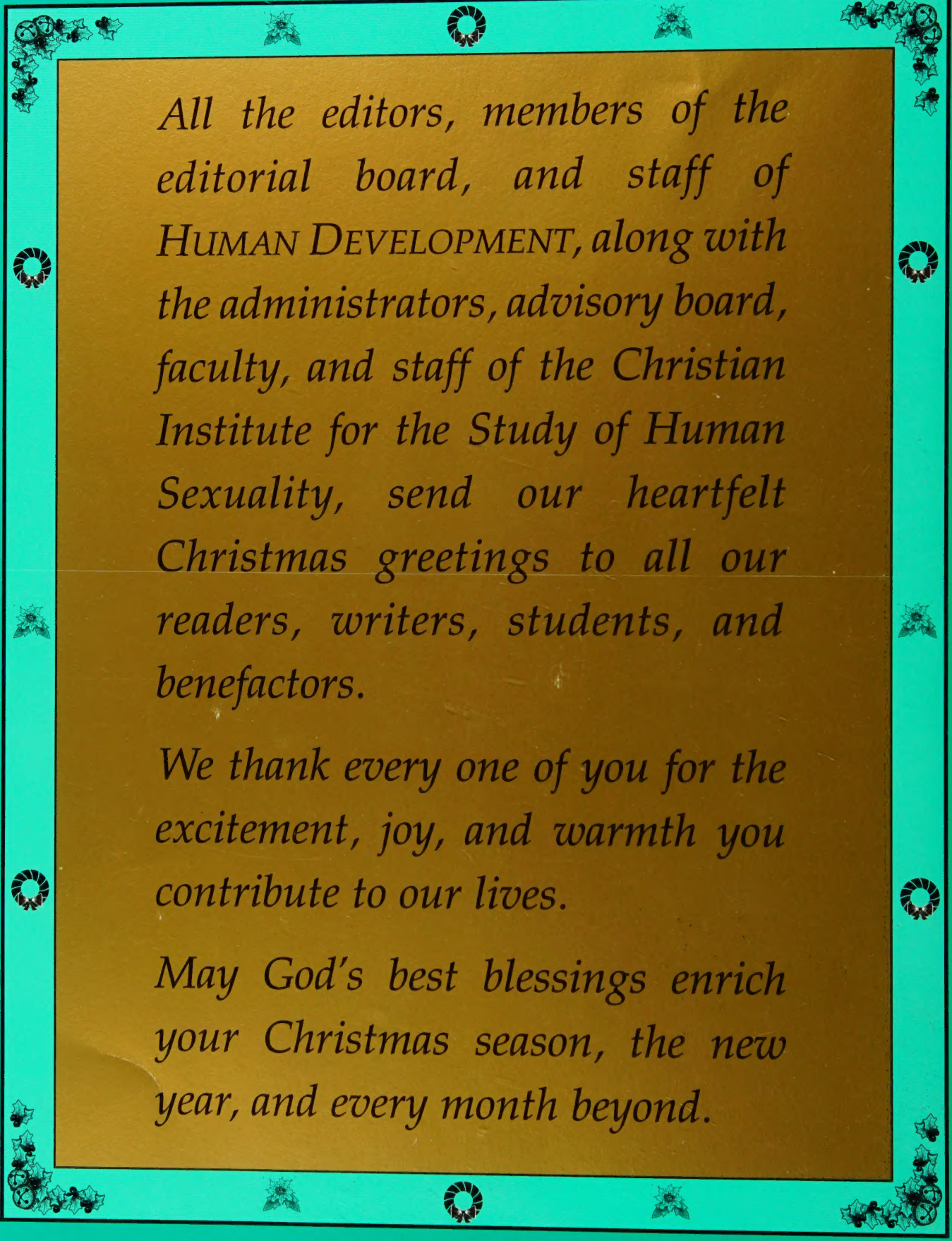
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*May God's best blessings enrich your Christmas season, the new year, and every month beyond.*